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The sun hammered down without mercy, yet the old man waited in the only shade he had—his beat up Stetson. With long sleeved shirt and vest, everything about the man was faded in the summer heat. The long Fourth of July weekend was over and the busiest place in Phoenix was the door of the building the old man was watching. Mostly Indians turned loose from the drunk tank, pushing their way to freedom. Larry tried to get by his grandfather without being seen but the old man was too quick and, like cutting a sheep from the herd, pulled him out of the crowd where he was hiding. Larry was too sick and broke to even attempt to flee. The judge had taken what was left of his prize money from the rodeo. Two days and they'd cleaned him out. The bars, the women, and the judge hadn't even left him enough to get drunk on. Grandfather didn't let go of him until his ass hit the hot seat of the Chevy pickup. Stinking the way he was, Larry could have been any drunk Indian.

Two coffees in their paper cups sat on the dash, the hot sun coming through the windshield had them damn near boiling. Larry gave the Phoenix jail the finger as his grandfather drove by. He set the coffee back on the dash—it was too hot to drink. He slumped down in the seat and adjusted his black Stetson over his eyes. *Fuck*, he thought, *back to the reservation and those stinkin' cows*. He was never going to get on the rodeo circuit this way. He woke up with the sun behind him and he knew they should have been on the

reservation by now. His grandfather spoke for the first time: “Shut up.”

Larry pulled his hat back down. *Ob, man. He’s pissed.* They were on Interstate 10 headed east. Twenty miles from Lordsburg, New Mexico, the old man turned off. Larry sat up and started to look around. He thought they were still in Arizona, but he’d never seen this part before. He breathed a little easier when he saw the truck-stop sign. His grandfather didn’t stop and turned onto Highway 80 southbound. Larry turned to his grandfather and before he could ask why they hadn’t stopped the old man said: “Shut up.”

Just past the six-house town of Rodeo, the old man took a dirt road heading east. Larry read the shot-up sign: “Skeleton Canyon 13 miles.” The old man was good on the dirt road. The pickup had a dust cloud behind it for half a mile. Grandfather slid his truck to a stop on top of a small hill. Larry could see a patch of green about a quarter of a mile away. The old man pointed at the green spot and Larry hopped out. He had to piss bad. As he was taking his leak, the old man fooled him—he drove away and left him right there in the middle of the desert. Larry sat on a rock half the night waiting for his grandfather to come back and get him. When he was so thirsty he couldn’t stand it anymore, he started walking toward the green spot. His one-week drunk sweated out of him in the first mile. With the sun already starting to come up during the second mile, he promised himself he was going to kill the old man. His brand new Tony Lama boots were tearing his feet up. It felt like a hundred scorpions were inside each boot. He finally reached the water hole around noon. He didn’t even strip off his clothes. He climbed right into the cattle tank and drank, sitting down. The coldest beer in town never tasted so good. He sat in the tank the rest of the day, so he missed the treasure. Not until the next morning while walking to

keep warm did Larry stumble across it. He was amazed. The colors were so bright. One red-and-green woven Navajo blanket with a Winchester rifle lying on it. He kept rubbing his eyes. He walked up to it and knelt next to the blanket. *Fuck. That's my grandfather's .30-.30.* A box of bullets, a small frying pan, a small bag, and a short length of neatly coiled rope were inside the neatly folded blanket. *Now what in the fuck am I supposed to do with this shit?* The brown paper bag got his attention. Inside, he found a box of Morton salt and a magnifying glass. Larry jumped to his feet and screamed at the top of his lungs, "I'LL KILL YOU MOTHERFUCKER!!!!"

The hawk that noticed Larry's leaping and yelling wasn't impressed and just floated higher on the air currents. By the time he'd calmed down it was dark and he realized he could have had a fire if he'd used the magnifying glass while the sun was up. The next morning he shot a desert jackrabbit and cooked it over the fire he'd started using the glass. He circled the whole area looking for empty cans to fill with water but there was nothing. *Shit, I'll never get to the highway without a way to carry water.* Larry stayed at the oasis for a week before moving further up into the canyon.

Larry figured out that Skeleton Canyon was haunted the first night he slept there. He'd found a cave with fire-blackened walls and he moved in, because he'd also found water. The small seep at the back of the cave had swarms of bees coming and going. Working in the gray darkness, he'd cleaned the small opening. The bees drove him off once, but the next time he'd come armed with a smoky torch. With the small spring clean, the cool water tasted sweet and its trickle never stopped.

He shot two deer and ruined the first one trying to make jerky. He figured there was a mountain lion living in the canyon because the first rotten carcass had been carried off.

He worked in the cool of the mornings and explored the surrounding area the rest of the day. When his Tony Lamas began to fall apart he used pieces of the iron-hard deer hide to make repairs. Trial and error. After he figured out how to soak the deer hide, he made repairs on the boots and he learned to avoid the sharp rocky areas that tore his makeshift repairs. For a pillow he used his shirt and two weeks went by before he realized he hadn't been wearing it at all. He cut the tops off his cowboy boots and made moccasins. Rough, but they protected his feet.

He'd never paid any attention to the old ways his people were always talking about. He and his friends thought it was all bullshit. Geronimo was an invention made up to scare the kids.

But his thoughts were changing. *Man, if I had a horse and a couple of bitches I could stay here forever. Fuck going back to Cibecue.* "Stabacue" the whites called it because drunk Indians were always knifing each other. Taking a bath in the stock tank during one of the few times he'd left the canyon, he noticed he'd lost his beer belly. That was also the day he climbed to the top of the canyon and sat looking south. *I wonder how far Mexico is.* Giggling to himself he thought, *I'll go down there and steal some horses—and some girls too.*

That was also the night the dreams started. The nightmares were so bad they woke him up in a cold sweat. All he could remember was horses everywhere and lots of gunfire. After that, he slept wrapped around his grandfather's rifle. By accident he found a way to carry water. He'd killed another deer and tried his hand at making sausage. He knew he had to wash the guts out and when he did, he discovered that the deer's stomach held water. He hung his homemade canteen on a tree branch. Full of water, it dried and cured. *Shit, yeah.*

Doesn't hold all that much and the water tastes like dead deer but

it works.

The shadow on the canyon wall across from the cave drew his attention. When the sun moved for fifteen minutes the shadow disappeared. He took the Winchester with him when he climbed up to the disappearing shadow. The cave opening was only about two feet across. Right away he figured he'd found the mountain lion's den. Finding no paw prints at the opening, he turned to leave but something made him change his mind. Halfway into the small cave it struck. Larry's hat stopped the rattlesnake from biting him on the forehead.

Larry was as quick as the snake. As it pulled back to strike again, Larry grabbed it right behind its shovel-shaped head and dragged the fighting snake outside. He kneeled on the diamondback and his folding knife really pissed off the four-foot rattler. Larry cut off half its rattles and threw the snake into a pile of rocks. Larry chuckled. The snake was still rattling away from the rock pile. He checked his beat-up Stetson and found that the snake had dented the front. Hat back on, he crawled into the small cave. Just past where he had encountered the snake he could stand. Barely four-foot across, with a sandy floor. *Good place to hide.* His eyes had adjusted to the dim light by the time he turned to leave. He saw the trash pile. *So that's what the snake was guarding.* Letting more light in by moving, Larry saw that it wasn't a trash pile at all. Two rifles stood against the wall. He picked up the leather-wrapped bundle next to the rifle. The dry leather felt like iron. He carefully pried the leather open and there were two curved wooden bows, their leather strings rotted away. The metal heads on the half dozen arrows were still tight but the feathers had turned to dust. On his knees, running his hands over the old things, he felt like he was in a holy place. Whoever had stored these things left no doubt that they were Apache. The rifle butts stood not in

the sand but on a worn out pair of moccasins.

The moccasins were the only thing Larry took from the hidden cave. He soaked them in spring water to soften and shape them—Apache old style—into their original shape. The soles were worn out and the toes curled, but the softened tops went almost to his knees. No other Indian tribe that Larry knew about wore the full boot-style footwear. He was in too much of a state of awe to keep them on his feet. Instead, he folded the moccasins and added them to his shirt pillow. Larry thought about the rifle shrine and what it meant. All he could come up with was that whoever the Apaches were who left the weapons planned on coming back. That started his plan.

Up near the other end of the canyon he killed another deer and made more jerky and another canteen. Hair side out, he made foot wraps with the green hide. As long as he didn't have to walk over too many rocks they would do. He was already on top of the canyon when the sun set. He was surprised by how busy the desert was at night. He was just one of the creatures that moved through the dim nocturnal light.

He was down to his last few swallows of water when he smelled the place. He holed up under a paloverde tree and watched all day. That night he walked in, bold as you please, filled his canteens from a horse tank, then spent two hours sitting outside the horse corrals. After a few minutes of fussing, the horses settled down. He let them get used to his smell and was back under his paloverde long before dawn. Next morning he watched the ranch for any sign that the Mexicans had seen his tracks. People came and went all day long. No one he saw raised any kind of alarm. Larry had turned nineteen that summer and he celebrated at the Mexican ranch.

Thinking of a birthday present, he made his selection.

That night he picked his gifts, he drank all the water he could hold and topped off his deer-stomach canteens. The buckskin stud was first and he watched Larry in the corral. Wild eyes flashing in the moonlight, he let Larry get right up to him before he tried to bite. Larry sidestepped and moved his arm out of the way. Using one of the halters off the corral pegs, he haltered the stud then rubbed his hands up and down his neck, over and over. The stud gentled right down. Next, Larry haltered the stud's two main ladies. During the day he'd watched the herd and he knew which mares the stud was always fooling with. His blanket for a saddle, Larry led the horses out. He was worried that the whole bunch would follow so he stood ready to wave the rest back, but they stayed and he got the three he wanted out of the corral. He was halfway back to Skeleton Canyon before the sun hit with full force. He never had figured out where the border was. He rode the buckskin and led the two mares into the canyon.

He rested the horses for a week and finally decided it was time to head for home. The lightly burdened and rested horses covered ground rapidly. He rode straight north. Water was his main worry but the ranches had tanks and the farmers had irrigation canals that he used. After four days, he rode up to his grandfather's house in Cibecue.

His grandfather didn't say anything until Larry put the horses in the corral. "You have learned the old ways well," and his grandfather smiled and led Larry into his house. Like lightning, the whole village knew about Larry's horse stealing down in Mexico. The girls who never paid him any attention before definitely took notice of him now. Larry was sure he'd added enough horses to his grandfather's herd and now he was ready to carry out the rest of his plan.

After two days at home, he double-checked the calendar on the wall next to the cook stove then asked his grandfa-

ther for a ride into Show Low. With fall roundup about to start, his grandfather wanted to know why he wanted to go to town. The old man grinned and approved. He waited for Larry outside the Army recruiter's office. The next day Larry left Show Low for basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia.