

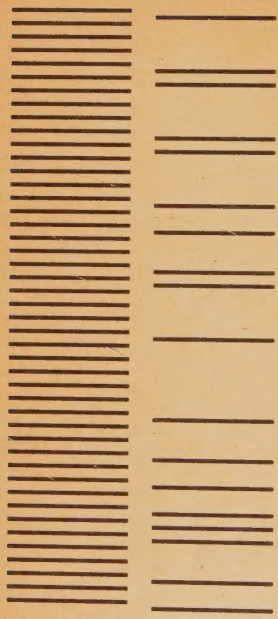
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WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN, IT SEEKS REVENGE.
WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN, IT CLAIMS ITS OWN.
WHO DARES DISTURB...

THE GHINDI

Brad Steiger
author of *The Hypnotist*





THE THING THAT IS NO THING . . .

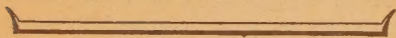
**THAT COMES WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN
AND TAKES ANY LIVING FORM.
IT BARES CLAW AND TALON AND FANG
TO KILL AND KILL AND KILL
. . . UNTIL IT HAS HAD ITS REVENGE.
. . . UNTIL IT HAS CLAIMED ITS REWARD.
. . . UNTIL ITS JOB IS DONE.**

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THE CHINDI



Brad Steiger

A DELL / QUICKSILVER BOOK

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*This book is for my mother and father
and for the Father-Mother-Creator-Spirit
whose essence exists in all things,
thus making us all
brothers and sisters.*

Prologue



For the white man it was the Gay Nineties. For the red man it was the decade that marked the death of the Old Ways, the entombment of the Great Spirit, and his surrender to an alien heritage. Then came Wovoka, the Paiute Messiah, who promised his people a path to a New Age.

The white man called him Jack Wilson when he worked as a ranch hand, learned their talk, and heard about their Jesus religion. He was powerfully built, markedly handsome, and just under six feet tall. His grandfather was the esteemed prophet Wodziwob. His father was the holy man Tavibo.

A strange fire burned within the heart of Wovoka, who was also called "the Cutter" by his own people. His friend of many winters, Moon Bear, a Paiute Medicine man, knew that Wovoka listened to voices in the wind.

A terrible fever entered Wovoka's body, and for three days he lay in death as his spirit walked with God, the Old Man. When he returned to life and to the arms of his wife Mary, he told those Paiutes assembled of the vision that he had received. Jesus moved again upon the Earth Mother. The dead were all alive, waiting to be reborn.

If the Indians wished the buffalo to return, the grasses to grow tall, the rivers to run clean, they must not injure anyone, they must not do harm to any living thing. They must not make war. They must lead lives of purity, cease gambling, put away strong drink and never again rent the bodies of their wives to satisfy the lusts of the white men.

The most important part of the vision that God gave to Wovoka was the Ghost Dance. Wovoka told his people that the dance had never been performed anywhere on earth. It was the dance of the spirit people of the Other World. To perform this dance was to insure that God's blessings would be bestowed upon the tribes.

God had talked to Wovoka as though he were his son. The Old Man had told him that many miracles would be worked through him. In his heart and in his life Wovoka became Jesus; Mason Valley, Nevada became Galilee; and the American Indians received their messiah.

It has been told that Moon Bear, and certain others close to Wovoka, did not want a gentle prophet of peace. They hoped for a strong holy man with powerful Medicine to fight the white man.

But Wovoka spoke only of the importance of all men living together in harmony, and he shook off the importuning hands of Moon Bear when his friend asked him to use his powers to drive the evil one from the land. By now many Indians from many tribes had seen the truth of his vision of peace, and they called him Jesus. His fame had spread so far and wide that even newspaper reporters came from St. Louis, New York, and Chicago to see the Ghost Dance Messiah and to record his words. Moon Bear put on a hard face toward Wovoka and went off to seek his own vision.

It was Moon Bear who went to the Sioux to teach them the Ghost Dance and to tell them the things that his vision had added to Wovoka's teachings.

ting Bull, the great Sioux prophet, listened carefully to the vision of rebirth and a return to glory for all Indian people.

Moon Bear told him that a specially decorated Ghost Shirt would turn the bullets of the white men to water. Such Medicine would transform the Sioux into invincible warriors. The white men could be purged from the land, so that, truly, the grasses would again grow tall, the buffalo would return, and the rivers would once more run clean.

The Sioux began to dance, and soon newspapers in the Dakotas were telling nervous and fearful settlers that the red men were preparing for war.

When the Sioux at Sitting Bull's Grand River camp began to dance with rifles, the white soldiers agreed that a great Indian revolt was about to occur. Everyone could now see that the Ghost Dance was a war dance.

On a December day in 1890 Indian police, Fouchet's Cavalry, and Drum's Infantry moved against the Sioux camp at Grand River. The aggressors also brought with them Hotchkiss multiple-firing guns and mountain howitzers. One of the first shots killed Sitting Bull. The soldiers, the automatic rifles, the angry, exploding shells destroyed the village.

When Wovoka learned of the horror, he went into retreat in his cabin in Mason Valley, guarded by loyal Paiutes who feared military reprisals against their Messiah.

Wovoka did not understand why the Sioux were dancing his vision wrongly. He did not know where they had received the vision of the buckskin and cotton shirts with the fringes and the wrong pictures painted on them. He did not comprehend why Sitting Bull was declaring himself high priest of the Ghost Dancers. Someone had told Sitting Bull a false and terrible thing.

Wovoka had only begun to recover from the shat-

tering news of Sitting Bull's fate when word reached him of the dawn attack on Big Foot's camp at Wounded Knee. The Sioux, as they were being slaughtered by two battalions of soldiers and mounted Hotchkiss guns, sang Ghost Dance songs, blended with their own death chants, and threw dust into the air as a symbol of the coming storm that would bury all whites.

Wovoka knew that he had told others only what God had told him. He had taught the dance carefully. He wept bitterly that certain unfaithful disciples had distorted the teachings.

It was as if an arrow had pierced his heart when Wovoka learned that his childhood friend Moon Bear, soured with disappointment, had sought his own vision of the Ghost Dance. The Paiute Messiah covered his head and his body with ashes when it became apparent that it had been Moon Bear who had brought the false vision to Sitting Bull, to Wounded Knee.

It has been told that when Wovoka heard of Moon Bear's return to Nevada, he banished him from Mason Valley forever. One account has it that, in his anger, Moon Bear fired point-blank at Wovoka with a powerful Sharps buffalo rifle. Some say the bullet went through the Messiah without harming him. Others have said that Wovoka caught the bullet in his teeth and spat it contemptuously at Moon Bear's feet.

It has been told that Moon Bear traveled to Canada to join the Sioux who had fled north. Others say that he traveled to Arizona to give the Ghost Dance to the Apache.

Certain old ones, who were with Wovoka when he went to the Land of the Grandfathers in the white man's year of 1932, say that shortly before his passing, the Messiah sought a dream of Moon Bear. Wovoka saw clearly that Moon Bear had been shot to death by a white man prospecting for gold near the mountains called McDowell, near a place called Scottsdale.

The old ones say that Wovoka saw a terrible thing. A spirit had been sung to life by a Navajo Medicine man and was holding on to Moon Bear, preventing his spirit from crossing the Great River to the Land of the Grandfathers. It was as though the Old Man had cursed Moon Bear for the sins against his people and that the seeds of death that Moon Bear had sown had been planted with his bones. . . .

One



When Carol Jacobs stepped off the 747 jet airliner at Phoenix's Sky Harbor Airport, she thought that she had walked into a direct blast from the big ship's exhaust.

"This heat is incredible, Barry," the attractive blond woman complained to her husband. "Maybe St. Paul isn't such a bad place after all. Maybe we shouldn't move to Scottsdale."

Barry squinted his blue eyes against the bright Arizona sun and paused in his deplaning to slip out of his tweed sports coat. A wind that felt as though it had been belched from a blacksmith's forge stirred his light brown hair. Perspiration poured from his skin.

"This is Boomtown, U.S.A., honey," he replied, taking Carol's arm as they left the portable stairs and headed toward the terminal building. "People get acclimatized to the heat. The opportunity for big bucks helps them get adjusted."

Carol's straw-colored hair seemed to be almost glowing in the desert sun. "As pale as I am, I'll get a sunburn before we get inside the terminal."

They entered the Western Airline gate, and the air conditioning hit them as icily as the damp wind from a sudden blizzard.

"I think my heart just stopped," Carol winced. "And my sinuses just clamped shut, but this deep freeze certainly beats the furnace outside."

A smiling, deeply tanned man in a green sports coat stepped forward from the small crowd of men and women encircling the new arrivals. A Homes-2001 badge was pinned to his right lapel.

"Pete Dolan?" Barry asked, a tentative smile of greeting on his lips. "We're Carol and Barry Jacobs."

"You're right," the man said, offering his hand first to Barry, then to Carol. "That's who I am and that's who you are. Welcome to Arizona."

Carol rolled her wide green eyes toward the ceiling and winced at the man's forced friendliness. Both she and Barry were real-estate agents, but she hoped neither of them appeared as transparent and as corny as Pete Dolan.

"Just keep walking down this corridor, cross the main lobby, and we'll be at the baggage-claim area," Dolan told them. "Do you have much luggage?"

"No," Barry answered, trying not to bump into the man as they walked away from the gate area. Ever the attentive salesperson, Dolan seemed never to move more than five inches from his side. "We don't plan to stay more than a couple of days. We'd like to pick out our home, make the arrangements, then get right back to St. Paul for the long drive out here. We want to be well settled before Bobby has to start school."

"That's the way we got the picture," Dolan grinned. "I've got six prize homes lined up for you to look over."

"All three-bedroom homes?" Barry checked. There were only the two of them and Bobby, but he hoped that his three kids by Elizabeth and their recently jet-tisoned marriage would be coming to visit after a few months. When they came, he wanted to have room for them.

"How long have you been working for Homes-2001 there in St. Paul?" Dolan asked. Barry noticed that

the man wore cowboy boots, and he wondered if he would ever go "western." Maybe Dolan affected the high-heeled boots to add to his height, Barry reflected. The bald-headed man was several inches shorter than his own six foot one.

"I've been working for them for eight years," Barry told him. "Carol has been with them for two."

Just before they entered the main lobby, they passed dozens of passengers lined up in front of the security X-ray machines. A huge mural of a colorful phoenix bird rising from its own ashes and flapping its gigantic wings across a symbolic montage of Arizona covered most of the wall above a bar-lounge and a restaurant. Between-plane travelers sprawled on colorful couches, reading newspapers or trying to nap. Others in the lobby slouched in front of a carousel of television sets or browsed at souvenir shops and newsstands.

"How hot is it out here?" Carol wanted to know. She could see palm trees, a crowded parking lot, and suntanned men and women in casual sports clothes walking about with suitcases in hand.

"Typical July afternoon," Pete Dolan told her. "It's about one hundred and three degrees. Supposed to hit a hundred nine tomorrow."

Carol's mouth dropped open as if she needed to gasp for air at the very declaration of the temperature in Phoenix. "How will we be able to survive out here?" she asked in a feeble voice. "I nearly died from the heat just walking from the airplane to the terminal."

Dolan laughed in response to what he assumed was Carol's overdramatization of her discomfort. "You get acclimatized," he said.

Carol narrowed her green eyes skeptically and nodded her head. "I'm going in here," she said as they passed a ladies' room. "Go on without me if you want. I'll find you in the baggage-claim area."

"No hurry. Always takes awhile for the baggage to

come in," Dolan said. "We'll wait right here for you by the drinking fountain."

Pete fished a roll of Lifesavers out of a pocket of his sports coat and offered an orange candy ring to Barry. "You certainly have a beautiful wife, Barry," he smiled. "Is she going back to work for Homes-2001 soon? She'd be a tremendous asset to our sales force."

Barry started to reach for the candy, then paused and shook his head in refusal. It didn't take long for any man with eyes and a mouth to notice, then to articulate, Carol's beauty. "Carol just wants to be a housewife and mother for a while," he answered Dolan. "Maybe she'll start work again after Christmas."

"I heard that your divorce got a little sticky, so that's why you two wanted to move from St. Paul so fast and come out here," Dolan said in a voice that had become little more than a whisper.

At first Barry felt the warmth of embarrassment begin to color his cheeks, then anger flared within him. "Gossip about the new salesman has preceded his arrival, is that it?"

Dolan raised two open palms before his chest. "Steady, Barry. No offense. I've been through three divorces myself. Each messier than the one before. I'm not judging you, man. Just making conversation."

Barry considered an apology, but he decided against it. Instead he explained to Dolan that their move to Scottsdale had been the result of several sessions of careful planning.

"This area seems to be one of the very hottest real-estate areas in the whole United States," Barry said. "We wanted the opportunity to be a part of this contemporary gold rush, so we were delighted when we learned that there was an opening in the Scottsdale office. Besides we were tired of those brutal Minnesota winters."

"A wise decision on both counts," Dolan agreed, eager to make up with the new salesman. "Scottsdale is definitely Boomtown, U.S.A."

"If I hear that phrase again, so help me, I'm going to scream," Carol warned them as she rejoined them from the ladies' room.

Dolan grinned affably, but he was quick to defend the phrase that Carol had promised would set her screaming. "But it's true, Carol," he chuckled. "Out here the construction workers are busy seven days a week. They start at five in the morning to beat the heat, then knock off around two in the afternoon. They keep that schedule even on Thanksgiving and Christmas, Hanukkah and Passover—and every Sunday and holiday in between.

"We moved here two years ago from New Jersey," Dolan continued, "and when we did, our new house was standing alone on the edge of the desert in Thunderbird Estates. I like to jog in the mornings, so this was a perfect situation for me. I had a whole damn desert to run in.

"Now, just two years later," Dolan emphasized, his voice rising to underscore his point, "we're the third house on the block! And everywhere as far as the eye can see are houses, houses, houses. Plus three new shopping centers! But the most fantastic thing, my friends, is that that house on the edge of the desert that we bought for seventy-five thousand dollars is now worth at least one hundred thirty thousand dollars! Real estate nearly doubles out here in two years."

"Go west, young man," Barry said, squeezing Carol's arm affectionately. "Go west to the land of golden opportunity."

"A golden opportunity to die of sunstroke and heat prostration," Carol said wryly.

"You'll get used to it, Carol," Dolan promised her. "You'll see the day when eighty degrees will feel cool to you. Now," he said, pointing toward the front of the terminal, "it must be time to pick up your baggage."

Homes-2001 had, as a courtesy, put Barry and Carol up at the Hilton on Scottsdale Road. As Pete Dolan

drove, he continued to describe the area that the Jacobses had chosen as their new environment. Carol rode in the front seat of Pete's Monte Carlo so that she could have the air conditioner blowing directly on her.

"Scottsdale is the driest, sunniest, clearest resort area in the United States, so we have a lot of winter visitors here from all over the country," Pete told them. "Many of these 'Snowbirds,' as we call them, eventually buy condominiums or conventional homes here. The real-estate market in Arizona is really incredible. Of course it is also competitive. Sometimes it seems like a third of the new population is real-estate agents."

Dolan turned north on Scottsdale Road from Thomas. "In the 1940s Scottsdale was a cow town of about seven hundred people. It's growing too fast to get an accurate count, but the population must be right around one hundred thousand now. Many people are coming here from Illinois, New York, Michigan, Ohio, New Jersey—you name it!"

Dolan went on with his guided tour of the city until he pulled up in front of the Hilton.

"How beautiful." Carol appraised the motel's architecture. "From a distance I thought it was a Spanish church."

"Do you want to freshen up, then look at place later this afternoon?" Pete prodded gently for her answer. "Or would you like to relax beside the pool today and get an early start in the morning?"

"We'll be ready to go this afternoon," Barry said.

Carol nodded her agreement. She had left Bobby with her mother, and in spite of Mom's good intentions and her good heart she was just too nervous to stay alone with a healthy eleven-year-old boy for more than two days.

"We want to make a decision as quickly as possible," Barry reminded Dolan. "We have the money for a down payment, and we know that you've done

good job selecting the right houses for us to choose from."

Pete traced a forefinger around his steering wheel. "I did my best, Barry. And we'll push the necessary papers through so that you'll be able to move in just as soon as you make the move in August."

"That's good," Barry said. "We appreciate your helping us out in expediting things. I understand that your office has already taken care of credit checks and all the red tape."

"Yep," Dolan nodded. "You just pick the house you want to buy from the six I've got lined up for you, and we'll set the machinery in motion."

"You're a good man, Dolan," Barry winked as he started to get out of the car to join Carol on the sidewalk in front of the Hilton. He knew that she would be wilting in the hot sun. "Can you be back in an hour or so to pick us up?"

"Sure can," Dolan assured him. He slid the gearshift into drive, then stepped on the brake, rolled down the window to call after them. "Are you going to want a pool? I've got some friends with a company that can put one in fast."

Carol shouted her answer over her shoulder as they followed a bellman inside the Hilton. "We most definitely want a pool!"

Dolan showed Carol and Barry six lovely homes, just as he had promised. They saw two that first afternoon and evening—one in a new development off Hayden Road, the other a bit too far out toward Fountain Hills. The third house he showed them that next morning was the one they wanted to see again that afternoon. It was a stylish Mediterranean brick home in the Pinnacle Peak area, and the McDowell Mountains served as a colorful backdrop.

"As soon as I walked in the door," Carol explained to the real-estate agent and to her husband, "I felt as though this was home."

Dolan smiled expansively. He had found them a

home. He had pleased his boss and satisfied a customer who would be a fellow employee at the agency. "That Italian tile is really a grabber in the entryway, isn't it?"

Carol agreed. "But you will see that they put a few more plants in the atrium, won't you, Pete?"

"Sure thing," Dolan promised. "Those do look a bit skimpy in there."

A professional afterthought made Dolan seek a verbal commitment from Barry, as well as from Carol. "Are you really sold on the place as much as Carol is?" he asked him. "Do you really like it?"

Barry had been standing in the kitchen, his back to his wife and the real-estate agent. "I'm puzzled by that odd-looking mound out there in the backyard," he told them, tapping his forefinger against the pane of the Arcadia doors. "I mean, everything else is just flat desert. Where did that mound come from?"

"Strange, isn't it?" Dolan conceded, now that he was almost certain of the sale. "Well, you just got a head start on your landscaping with that little hill back there. A lot of people haul in dirt and make mounds to break up the monotony of the flat backyards. You could plant a couple of saltbushes on top, or maybe some yuccas, and you'd have a really sharp addition back there."

Barry pursed his lips reflectively. "We'll have to bring the pool closer to the house because of it. Sure is funny that they didn't scrape that mound out when they were building the house, though."

Pete Dolan was stirred by a memory. "Hey, yeah, it is funny. You know, I was driving around with the contractor who built this house when they were clearing the land here. I recall that he got into a hassle with the bulldozer operator about that mound."

Barry was intrigued. The mound had a history. "What kind of hassle?"

Dolan laughed. "Well, the dozer operator was a Navajo, and sometimes the Indians around here get a

little ornery just to plague and torment their bosses. At first the Indian seemed to pretend that he didn't understand that the mound should be plowed away. Then he argued that the mound looked good right where it was."

"Obviously the Indian won," Barry said, studying the mound, which rose to a height of about three feet and which now supported two tumbleweeds and three strands of dried buffalo grass.

"By default," Dolan explained. "By the time we left that day, Mellenbacker, the contractor, had ordered the Navajo to scrape away the mound. Next time he got back here to inspect, the walls around the yard had already been built and the mound was still there."

Carol rejoined them from one of the bedrooms. "I've made complete mental notes, Barry. A lot of our furniture will fit just great, and I can keep new purchases of draperies and other stuff down to a minimum." Her eyes were wide and happy. Pleasure in the home was making her more eager to move to Arizona.


"This does it then?" Dolan prompted ever so gently. "You two ready to sign on the dotted line?"

Carol sought Barry's hand with one of her own and squeezed his fingers. "Let's do it, honey. This house really feels like home."

Something in Barry hesitated. But Carol's happiness and obvious enthusiasm obliterated his reluctance to commit himself wholeheartedly to the house.

"Okay, Dolan," he nodded. "You've got a deal. Mound and all."

Two



Barry Jacobs turned the long, slender bone over in his fingers three or four times before something about the way the Chicano workman was grinning at him told him the skeletal fragment was human.

"Your wife can make you some good soup tonight," the man laughed. He had several front teeth missing from his broad smile. His black, shanky hair was plastered to his skull with sweat.

"You gonna give us some more beer, mister?"

"Sure." Barry nodded toward a plastic tub filled with melting ice and cans of beer. It was 109 degrees on that September afternoon in Scottsdale, Arizona. The courtesy of beer kept the men who were digging the swimming pool from glaring less sullenly at the immigrant Yankee gringos who had bought their servitude.

"Where did you find this . . . this bone?" Barry asked as the man turned his broad back to him.

Barry had always had a revulsion toward dead things. As a boy back in Minnesota he had found it impossible to pick up the dashed baby birds that had littered the grassy floor of the apple orchard after a spring storm.

"Ramon?" he asked again tentatively. He thought

he had heard the others calling the man Ramon. "Where did you find this bone?"

Ramon's thick fingers claimed a can of Budweiser from the ice. The beer foam spurted a bit when he snapped off the tab, and he grinned in childish amusement at the spray. At last he found time to answer Barry's question: "Over there. With the rest of the body, mister."

"There's a body in my backyard?" Barry had a dark vision of policemen pulling a moldering corpse from a shallow grave and bombarding him with a lot of messy questions. He would probably make front page of the *Scottsdale Progress*.

That would be all Barry needed. Remarried three months, in Arizona three weeks, trying his damndest to compete with a couple of thousand other real-estate agents in the Phoenix area, and some pool diggers had to unearth a body in his backyard.

"There's a bunch of bones, lots of pots and beads and things," Ramon said, pointing to a mound where the four other workmen were leaning on shovels and studying the earth. It was the same mound that had bothered Barry when he and Carol had first looked at the house in the Pinnacle Peak area.

"Pots and beads?" Barry imagined an old hobo who had been buried by his buddies. Then he remembered where they were. Arizona. Hopis. Navajos. Apaches. Pimas.

"You've dug into an Indian burial mound," Barry said. "That hump of dirt was an Indian burial mound."

"You got it, mister," Ramon laughed. "Old Geronimo himself might be lying there in your backyard."

Barry scowled. "What do we do now? I mean, what do we do about the skeleton and the things?"

Ramon shrugged. "It's your land, mister."

"But what's the law about such things?"

Ramon belched and shrugged again.

Barry heard the back door opening. It would be Carol wondering why the men had stopped work.

"Honey," his wife asked, approaching the edge of the large hole the earth-moving machinery had gouged away earlier in the week, "why have the men stopped working?"

Barry hated it whenever Carol left the house on one of her inspection tours. She wore only a black halter and cut-off jeans, and Barry didn't like the way the men looked at her.

He didn't understand Spanish, but once after she had gone back in the house, one of the laborers had said something in a blurring rush of words and all the men had laughed. Barry knew the man must have commented on the full breasts of his blond wife.

"Babe, they've uncovered an Indian burial mound," Barry told her. "You know, that lump we spotted when we first looked at this place."

Carol shuddered and crinkled her nose. Barry suddenly became conscious of the fact that he still held the bone in his fingers.

"Ramon," he said. "Put this thing back where you found it."

Ramon grinned, took the slender bone from Barry's fingers, and started back toward the other men.

Carol squinted her wide green eyes into the scorching Arizona sun. "What do we do, Barry?"

"I don't know." Why the hell did she have to wear nothing more than a damn skimpy halter to cover her breasts? The same man who had made the comment before was staring at her like a starving man trying to eat with his eyes.

"Do we call the police? The police usually know what to do about dead bodies." Carol put her hands on her hips, the way she often did when she was thinking something over carefully.

Barry shook his head. "I don't think this is a criminal matter."

"Of course not, honey," she sighed in playful ex-

peration. "But the police always know what to do with bodies."

If he talked to her about the halter and her breasts, she would only become angry about the double standard—how men could go bare-chested if they liked. How men never had to worry about their nipples showing. Why did men make such a big deal over breasts and nipples?

"Should I go in and call the police?" she offered.

It was a good thing he had the kind of job that he had, real estate. That way he could always be dropping by home. The workmen never knew when he might be arriving. The way they looked at Carol, good God, he wouldn't trust them as far as he could throw a horse if they saw him leave in the morning on a regular nine-to-five.

"Haven't you learned about such things yet, honey?" Carol questioned. "I mean, from your friends in the real-estate office."

He had no friends in the real-estate office—only smiling enemies. The competition among the men and women in the office was that of gold-rush miners feverishly panning for the biggest nuggets before the mother lode cooled and nothing was left but silt.

"I've learned about the Arizona point system of real estate, mortgages, second mortgages, and where the areas are that are most often hit by flash floods; but we've yet to discuss what to do with bodies in the backyard," Barry told her.

"Come look, mister, missus," Ramon was bidding them with an expansive wave of his thick arm. "Come look at this old Indian."

The other workmen stepped back as Carol and Barry approached. It was obvious that Ramon was their unofficial leader. Perhaps he was the only one who spoke English well enough to converse with the Anglo employers.

"Big old machines dug in right next to the mound yesterday," Ramon explained, gesturing with the beer

can. "Then Luis here chopped into it with his shovel. I think this is an arm bone."

Ramon set the bone back into the hole. Barry and Carol could see a leather sleeve, the top of a pot.

"At least it doesn't smell," Carol said crinkling her nose again.

Ramon laughed. "All smells been gone from this old dude long time ago."

"Was he Navajo?" Barry asked.

Ramon tipped the can back and let the last few drops fall into his open mouth. "How the hell should I know?" he shrugged and wiped his mouth with the back of a hairy hand. "He ain't got no driver's license on him!"

Barry tried not to become irritated with the man. "Well, I want to do the right thing by him, whoever he was. I just can't believe we would dig into an Indian mound out here in Pinnacle Peak. I thought all the burial grounds were up around Old Oraibi on the Hopi reservation."

"Hell, no," Ramon frowned. "The whole damn cities of Phoenix, Scottsdale, Tempe, and Mesa are squatting on top of where old Indian cities used to be. They got to build streets around some of the burial grounds right in downtown Phoenix. They always hit them when they dig sewers and things."

"Then *someone* must know what to do with the skeletons and the artifacts," Carol said.

Ramon seemed suddenly distracted from the conversation. He turned and picked up his shovel where he had lain it next to the hole in the burial mound.

"Hey!" Carol complained, annoyed by the rudeness of the man. "Isn't that right? Aren't there people who know what to do with these remains?"

Ramon turned to face her, an insolent smile replacing a transient sneer that had curled his lips for just an instant. "Don't say 'hay' to me. I'm not a horse. I am Ramon. See? Ramon. Not *hay*."

The workmen obviously understood enough En-

lish to know when the gringo lady had been put down, for they chuckled softly as they leaned on their shovels, sweating in the broiling sun.

"Okay, Ramon," Barry frowned, keeping his temper in check. "We duly note your name. Now, do you know—from your knowledge of the area, from your experience in working with swimming-pool companies—who to contact when you uncover an Indian burial mound?"

Ramon presented them with his gap-toothed grin. "Sure, I know such a person. You want me to get him? We have to stop work right now if you do."

"Why stop work?" Carol protested. "The pool was supposed to be ready before we moved to Scottsdale at the end of August. Here it is September fifth, and you're still not finished."

Ramon frowned, once again on the defensive. "It's not our fault the pool company got a cement shortage. We got here two days after the pool company called us."

"No one is blaming you for the fact that our pool is four weeks behind schedule, Ramon, but why must all work be stopped because of the skeleton in our backyard?"

Barry was becoming increasingly irritated with perpetually having to mollify the man.

And if the truth were known, he would be happy if the pool would not be put in until spring. His three kids from the marriage so recently shattered on the rocks of connubial hazard would be visiting at Christmas, and he would be delighted if they would not return to his ex with the word that Daddy had built a swimming pool for his new wife and her son. Everyone had a pool in Scottsdale, Arizona. Not everyone had a pool in St. Paul, Minnesota.

"We got to stop work because there may be more skeletons and pots and things all over here," Ramon said as if his answer would be obvious to anyone with

the intelligence of a lizard. "If we smash into those pots, they ain't no good to anyone anymore."

Barry nodded slowly.

Carol whined: "But you can see that there are no bones and pots sticking out of the walls in the main hole, just over there where the gas tank for the pool heater is going to be buried. Why must you stop working on the big hole?"

Ramon shrugged. "It's up to you, mister, missus. But maybe the guy I know would pay you something for these old pots and beads and things."

"Pay us?" Barry echoed in astonishment. "I didn't think college professors would pay to unearth relics."

"College professors?" It was Ramon's turn to play echo.

"Isn't the man you refer to a college professor? Probably with the university in Tempe or the community college in Scottsdale. Isn't he an archaeologist or an anthropologist?" Barry asked.

"Sure," Ramon nodded solemnly. "He's one of them guys."

"How much would he pay?" Carol's latent avarice had been activated.

"Come on, honey," Barry scolded her gently. "That shouldn't be our principal concern. The important thing is that the skeleton receives proper attention."

"Listen, Barry," Carol said, her voice rising a bit stridently. "With the mortgage payment on this house, your support payments to Elizabeth, and all the other unexpected bills we've endured since we moved here, I would happily go out and play 'Taps' on wax paper and a comb over those dry bones if those pots could bring us a couple of bucks."

Ramon laughed. "The missus knows how to watch the dollars. You're a lucky guy, mister. All my woman knows how to do is spend the dollars."

Carol smiled prettily and preened noticeably at the compliment. "I told him if he married me, I would

see to it that he made money," she said, taking Barry's arm for emphasis.

Barry smiled weakly. They had both worked for the same real-estate firm in St. Paul. Carol had been divorced for four years, a natural straw-blond dazzler whose slender, full-breasted figure and remarkable business brain had made her the most pursued and the most confident woman Barry had ever confronted. Barry had been firmly married, a veteran of eleven years and three kids. He had never realized how dissatisfied he had become with Elizabeth until he met Carol.

He had never thought himself capable of an affair until Carol agreed to go with him to a motel after they had both been working late one night. He had never thought sex was anything more than agreeable mutual exercise until that night when he had first entered Carol and found himself with a passionate tigress clawing his shoulders.

"All right, Ramon," Barry said softly. "Tell the other men to knock off for the day." He glanced at his watch and continued: "It's three fifteen now. How soon can you be back with your professor?"

Ramon took a pocket watch out of a shirt flap. "Before six," he said after studying the face for a moment. Then he amended his estimate: "We'll be back before six thirty, maybe seven."

"Will the professor be able to make a financial appraisal at that time?" Carol asked, fixing the full power of her large green eyes on Ramon.

"Sure, missus," Ramon laughed. "He'll give you some bucks right away."

Three



I, Moon Bear, served the one some said was Jesus come again upon the earth.

The Other World told their prophet to teach that the Indians must not hurt anyone or do harm to any living thing. They must not drink whiskey. They must not fight. They must no longer hate the whites.

The Ghost people gave their prophet a dance to take back with him to earth. It was the dance of the spirits of the Other World. It was a dance of goodness, a dance from heaven. It was dance to make the Indian free, to bring back the buffalo and the tall grasses.

The white men who knew him before the vision called him Jack Wilson.

Most people called him Wovoka, the Red Messiah.

I, Moon Bear, called him One With the Morning Star on His Head. I saw him return from the dead. I followed him, and I served him. I knew that it would be he who would drive the white men back into the ocean, that Wovoka would make the rivers run red with their blood.

Wovoka talked of peace, of love, of all men walking arm in arm as brothers. But I knew this could

come only when the white man was destroyed and driven from our lands.

That is why I, Moon Bear, told the Sioux of the Ghost Dance that would bring back spirits from the Other World to help them fight the white man. I told them of the Ghost Shirt that would turn the white man's bullets into water.

The great Sitting Bull liked the dance and the shirt. He decided that he, too, would be a prophet of the Ghost Dance.

I was at Wounded Knee, and I saw the Sioux shot down in the snow. I saw their twisted bodies frozen in the cold.

When I returned to Wovoka, he told me that the Sioux danced it all wrong. They painted the pictures all wrong. They made the shirts all wrong.

Someone, Wovoka said, had corrupted his pure religion. Only the Great Spirit could decide the white man's retribution. There were to be no guns, no anger, no war talk at the Ghost Dance. Who had brought this message to the Sioux?

I told him that I had been given a vision that showed me how to change the dance and how to sing new songs to drive the white man back to the great waters.

I told One With the Morning Star on His Head that peace could not come until the white man was chased away from our land. I told him that I was to be his knife to cut away the bad white men.

But the prophet told me that he was the Messiah, that he had come only to bring peace, that it was up to God, his father, how to deal with the white man. He was sad that I had done such a terrible thing to the Sioux. He said that I was guided by the Evil One. He said that I must be good, I must be purified.

I raised my rifle at his heart. I told him that he had lost his vision, that he would be better dead than made to suffer at the hand of the white men. I said

that the soldiers would blame him for Wounded Knee and would come for him.

I pulled the trigger but nothing happened. No bullet struck Wovoka down.

I opened the breech to put in another cartridge, but two young men grabbed me and threw me to the ground.

Wovoka told me that only God could kill him, that I was to leave the land of the Paiute forever.

I, Moon Bear, came to the land of the Apaches, the Navajo, the Hopi.

The Hopi lived on their parched rocks and bothered no one. The Navajo had been beaten. But I knew the Apache would never surrender to the white men. I would bring the Apache the Ghost Dance. I would give them the Ghost Shirt. I would sing my new song for them. We would roll up the earth and spin the white man off the Earth Mother.

But I never found the White Mountain Apache. I never saw the Mescalero. The old white man who looked for the yellow gold found me and shot me.

The Navajo woman who found me later, after much blood had left my body, brought me to a great healer. The healer sang over me. He painted sand pictures that had great power.

But the bullets had torn away my life. My hate was bitter within me for only a time, for I knew I would soon be with the grandfathers in the spirit world.

The healer told me that he would go to find one greater than he, and together they would help me live. He said that he would leave his spirit helper, his Chindi, with me. The Chindi, he said, would watch over me and see that no one would disturb me.

Before the healer returned, my spirit left my body. But the Chindi, the Thing that lies with me, prevented my passing to the Land of the Grandfathers.

Three young Navajo men buried me and sang over me, thinking my spirit would travel to the Other World. I wanted to cross the river, but the healer had

left the Chindi to restrain me. It is many things and no thing. But its power is great, and I know it seeks only to protect me as it was instructed.

I have lain here many moons awaiting the healer, while my unseen companion forever clutches me fast to a bosom I can never see.

Today something disturbed us.

Something penetrated our hiding place.

But the Chindi can do nothing until night falls.

If the healer has found us at last, then he will release the Chindi from his mission so that I may go to the Land of the Grandfathers.

If it is not the healer, then the Chindi will deal harshly with all men who disturb my resting place.

Four



Barry Jacobs was certain that he was alone before he let his shorts drop around his ankles.

He sucked in his stomach, expanded his chest, raised his arms, and swelled his biceps. The pectoral area was still firm, a tribute to years of daily bench presses with the barbells. Although the biceps had lost an inch or two, they would still tape well over fifteen inches. But the waist was loose. A damn roll of fat was resting ugly at the beltline.

He let the air out of his chest and permitted his stomach to form its natural contour. God, there was no way out of it. He was getting a paunch. It was back to the weights, back to jogging every damn day. No excuses. No way was he going to be over the hill at thirty-four.

Carol was at the door, jiggling the knob: "Honey? Are you in there? Why is the door locked?"

It was locked because he knew she never hesitated to walk into the bathroom whether he were showering or moving his bowels. She had an ease about body functions that he did not. Nor did she seem to revere a state of privacy. Carol loved to share all experiences.

"What are you doing in there, Barry?" Her voice

was low, suggestive. "Are you playing with yourself?" she teased. "Anything you can do, I can do better."

"I'll be right out," he said, reaching for the stool lever and flushing it as a diversionary action. "Do you need to use the bathroom?"

"No, those people just pulled up in front of the house. The ones to see about the dry bones in our backyard. There are two cars and two pickups."

Barry pulled up his shorts. "What the hell kind of expedition is that? I certainly hope those people do not plan an archaeological dig in our backyard."

"Oh my God," Carol moaned from the other side of the door. "That would be all we need. Wouldn't it be terrible if they found an ancient-city site back there, and we had twenty college students digging up our lot."

"It would go down in the books as the 'Jacobs site,'" Barry laughed as he pushed open the door.

"And maybe," Carol giggled girlishly, joining the game, "maybe that old Indian is the missing link. And he goes down in the history books as the 'Jacobs man.'"

"I have an uncle who has already been nominated as the missing link." Barry shook his head. "Old Uncle Mort is definitely pre-Neanderthal."

The doorbell rang, and eleven-year-old Bobby was running to answer it. Carol and Barry heard a deep male voice asking if his mommy and daddy were home.

"Better get it, hon," Carol said, stretching across their king-sized bed. She had her new copy of *Better Homes and Gardens*.

"Aren't you coming out to witness the excavation?" It seemed as though her answer was going to be negative, and Barry was just as pleased that it would be. She still wore only the skimpy shorts and halter.

"I don't care about old dead Indians and cracked pottery," she said, flipping abstractedly through the brightly colored pages of ideal American bedrooms

and bathrooms. "Just be certain that he gives you something for our trouble."

That was Carol—ever mindful that her share of the coin of the realm would be entering her coffers.

"Do you mind if Bobby watches?" Barry asked. "I know that he'll be curious."

"He'll have nightmares if he sees some leering skull being unearthed from his own backyard. My God, Barry," Carol scolded, "use your head! Would you expose Paul to such a display?"

Paul was Barry's own ten-year-old by Elizabeth. Carol often brought him up for purposes of comparison.

"Yes," Barry answered honestly. "Yes, I would. I think it would be very educational."

Carol raised an eyebrow. "Educational if he were going to be a grave robber or a mortician."

"Or if he was going to be an historian, an archaeologist, an anthropologist, or anyone else who wanted to know something about his nation's past," Barry argued quietly. He wished that Paul *were* there to see the removal of the artifacts. He wished that Paul were there and not Bobby.

"All right, for God's sake." Carol admitted defeat with a deep sigh and a dramatic closing of the magazine. "All right, let Bobby warp his mind for the sake of a sense of the past. Just promise me that you will explain things to him and emphasize those educational aspects you value so highly when he starts screaming in the middle of the night."

Barry nodded. Bobby was pushing open the bedroom door, his large blue eyes sparkling with curiosity.

"Hey, Barry," he whispered—they had agreed that the boy wouldn't call him Daddy—"there's a cowboy at the door. And four cars filled with people in front of our house. Is it about the Indian in our backyard?"

Barry frowned at the word "cowboy." He was expecting a professor from the university. Oh, well, the

way men dressed out here, one's attire seldom indicated his position.

"Yeah, Bobby," Barry told him. "They've come about the Indian burial mound in the yard. Would you like to come watch?"

"Yeah!" Bobby elongated the word and widened his eyes in pleasure and excitement. "I wanna get my cowboy hat on first."

Barry went to the door while his stepson rushed to his room to dress for the occasion of his first formal disinterment.

Bobby was right. There was a cowboy at the front door.

"Howdy, Mr. Jacobs. I'm Cal Hawkins." The tall, slim man extended a large, sunbrowned hand after he deftly peeled a tight-fitting black leather glove from his fingers. The hand that held the shucked glove also held a flat-brimmed black Stetson hat.

"Just call me Barry," he said, shaking Hawkins's hand. The tall man had obvious strength in his fingers and wrist.

"That's right friendly of you, Barry," Hawkins smiled. "And remember: I'm Cal."

"Cal it is."

Barry was intrigued by the man. Cal Hawkins stood at least six foot three in his black pointed-toe cowboy boots. He was kind of handsome in a weathered way. A thin scar below his left eye showed white against the sun-brown of his cheek, but it did nothing to detract from his open and friendly manner.

"Hey," he snapped his fingers. "Hey, Cal. Did anyone ever tell you that you look like Gary Cooper?" Barry felt foolish immediately after he had said it, but it came out spontaneously, before he could check it.

Cal grinned, looked shyly down at the floor. "Folks have mentioned it. Nowadays they say I kinda look like Clint Eastwood. 'Specially since he had that scar beneath his eye in *The Outlaw Josey Wales*."

"Yeah," Barry nodded, reluctant to give up Gary Cooper. "Yeah, I can see a bit of Clint."

"Anyways," Cal returned to the business at hand, "Ramon tells me we got us some Indian burial grounds in your backyard."

"God, I hope not," Barry complained. "Not burial grounds. One grave is all. I hope, anyway."

Bobby joined them, his cowboy hat fastened securely to his head by a string beaded beneath his chin. He put his hand in Barry's.

Cal said. "Right nice-looking lad, your boy."

"He's my wife's boy," Barry said, an image of Paul flashing across his consciousness.

"Oh, I see," Cal nodded understandingly.

The smile had left Bobby's lips, and his eyes clouded over with pain. Touched, Barry quickly added: "But now he's *my* boy, too. And we're great buddies. Right, Bobby?"

"Right, Barry!" Bobby's grin brought back the sun to his eyes.

Bobby had never known his own irresponsible father. And the man was still too busy making his music in coffeehouses and on college campuses to maintain any contact at all with the son he had fathered in a long-forgotten moment of passion. Although Bobby uttered the required "Barry" with his lips, Barry knew that the boy was saying "Father" in his heart.

"You two gonna be our sidewalk superintendents while we do the digging?" Cal asked.

"That's us," Barry agreed. "I'll show you to the backyard."

Five



As he closed the front door behind them, Barry studied the crew that Cal had brought with him.

A young couple in their twenties were sitting on the hood of a battered '72 Chevrolet station wagon that had possibly begun its life with a blue exterior. It was mostly rust colored now—real rust.

Ramon was leaning against the same green Ford pickup he had driven to work earlier that day. He grinned and waved. A crusty old desert-rat type sat on the bumper of Ramon's pickup. A newer Ford pickup, about a '78 model, was parked next to Ramon's; and Barry could make out what appeared to be another Chicano, probably in his fifties, sitting quietly inside, smoking a cigar.

There was one more man, husky, mean looking, with a full beard and long black hair standing talking to a pretty, full-breasted blonde who wore her hair in a teased beehive, Nashville-Queen style. Barry figured the white '78 Cadillac Eldorado was Cal's.

"You certainly bring quite a bunch with you," Barry said.

"Well," Cal grinned and shrugged as he placed the black Stetson back over his gray-streaked brown hair, "we dig together a lot. We're kinda like partners.

Besides, Barry, you never know what you're gonna find on these digs. Might be more than a couple of diggers can handle."

Makes sense, Barry thought as he walked to the side of the house to open the gate to the backyard. Bobby's hand had fastened itself around his forefinger. He could tell the boy was braced for adventure.

"Nice house, Mr. Jacobs," the old man said. "Bet it cost you over a hundred thousand, the way prices are shooting up out here."

"Damn it, Jake," Cal snapped. "What this place cost Barry is none of your damned business. You just go on and put your back to your shovel."

When they had all gathered around the burial mound, Cal held up his hand for attention.

"Barry," he began, "that old duffer without any manners goes by the handle of Jake Hardesty. He taught me all he knew about digging years ago. Took him about two hours to teach me all he knew."

The old man was busy filling a battered pipe with tobacco. Still smarting from Cal's scolding for his lack of manners, Jake glanced up quickly, nodded, then lowered his eyes to the stuffing of the pipe bowl. His Stetson's brim was pinned up in front, and the area around the sweatband was stained with many summers.

"Carlos Dominguez, here, is about the smartest man in these parts—next to me," Cal laughed.

A trim man, over six feet, somewhere in his early fifties, stepped forward to shake Barry's hand. Dominguez had been the man in the newer Ford pickup.

"Carlos is the manager of the Mexicana Antigua import shop in downtown Scottsdale," Cal added by way of further identification. "You probably seen it."

Barry frowned. "We're still pretty new here. Is it in the Fifth Avenue shops?"

Dominguez's handshake was firm, friendly. "It is in the plaza area."

Barry smiled and nodded as if the additional desig-

nation had helped him place the store. He still had no idea where it was.

"Ed Gooch is the overgrown hippie there." Cal pointed at the surly looking man who had been talking to the blonde.

The others laughed at Cal's teasing, but Gooch became all the more sullen. He hooked his thumbs in belt hoops and nodded. His narrowed eyes seemed to be staring at Barry down a rifle barrel. His full black beard and nearly shoulder-length hair made him appear to be a mountain man materialized from the Old West.

"'Course you know old Ramon here." Cal indicated the smiling, gap-toothed laborer. "And you found out that he ain't nearly as dumb as he looks."

Ramon laughed loudly as if he were grateful for any attention, no matter how demeaning, that might be directed toward him. Barry was surprised that the Chicano appeared to work with the professor on a level of camaraderie that permitted denigrating jokes.

Cal snaked a long arm around the blonde who had been standing next to him and drew her close. "This lovely little thing is Kathy Miller, the poor man's Dolly Parton."

Kathy screwed up her face in mock anger and punched Cal on the upper arm. "Now you stop that, Cal Hawkins!"

The physical retribution delivered, she turned to Barry and delivered a melodic, "Pleased to meetcha."

Then, dropping to her knees, she plucked Bobby's hand from where it dangled loosely at his side and shook it vigorously. "And pleased to meet you, cowboy!"

"Pleased to meet you," Bobby returned, then looked up at Barry and grinned self-consciously. Barry was pleased that the woman saw fit to acknowledge the boy.

"And that there is Sam Henderson and his wife Merry." Cal waved his big hand toward the young

couple. "He's a lineman for the county, and she's the best waitress that Hobo Joe's has in their employ."

Sam shifted his broad, thin shoulders in a side-to-side swagger as he took four steps forward to shake Barry's hand.

His wife, a small, mousey-haired woman, attempted an imitation of Kathy's attention toward Bobby. She went down into a squat before the boy, but her gangling, awkward husband accidentally bumped her and sent her sprawling into the chunks of dirt around the burial mound.

"You clumsy sumbitch!" she shouted in her embarrassment and surprise.

Then her eyes widened at the realization that her coarse language in front of the boy had demolished her ladylike pretensions. "I . . . I'm sorry, kid, mister."

Sam's apologies to her might as well have been delivered in a foreign language. Merry glared molten lava at him as he pulled her to her feet with one of his long arms.

"Okay, you two," Cal snorted. "Stop playing around in the dirt. It's time to get to work!"

Barry was puzzled by the easy informality which the professor showed toward the members of his digging party. With each passing day he was learning that life truly was more relaxed in Arizona and that most of the people were more easygoing in Scottsdale than they had been in St. Paul.

But Professor Hawkins seemed to be carrying a folksy attitude to its absurd extreme. Barry had expected a carload of academic types, perhaps a couple of graduate students along to do some of the donkey labor. Hawkins obviously enjoyed working with non-academic personnel.

There was no question that the crew was an experienced one. In an almost unbelievably short period of time the burial mound had been opened and the artifacts removed. The diggers had worked in almost

complete silence, with only an occasional "careful" or "don't miss that" to break what seemed to be a reverential quiet.

"Damn," Ed Gooch swore. "I was hopin' for some Mimbres pots."

"There sure ain't much here," Jake Hardesty shook his head. "Them's Navajo pots, Cal, but what do you make of the rest of it?"

Cal was studying the assortment of artifacts. The others stood quietly by, leaning on their shovels, lighting cigarettes, pipes, or cigars. No one intruded upon Hawkins's assessment of their booty.

"Lessee," Cal thought out loud after a few moments of mental evaluation. "There is one rusted Sharps buffalo rifle. First off, ladies and gents, that tells us this ain't no ancient mound. No Mimbres pots here."

Hawkins turned to Barry and the boy. "The Mimbres lived in this valley hundreds of years before the Spanish got here. They developed a great pottery tradition, made it a real art form. Not too long ago in New York, a single Mimbres pot brought twenty thousand dollars."

Barry whistled his amazement, then shook his head in disappointment. A couple of those, and his share might have paid off the goddamn pool.

"Okay," Cal continued, "so what else have we got? There's 'bout a dozen Navajo pots that go back to around the turn of the century, maybe. They're worth something. Not too much, though."

The toe of Hawkins's boot touched a twisted piece of leather. "That's what's left of the old dude's Medicine bag."

He knelt over the skeletal remains. "Hey, Carlos," he called for confirmation. "Is this what I think it is?"

"Sí," Dominguez agreed. "It is a Ghost Shirt. What we appear to have here is a Paiute wearing a Wovoka

Ghost Shirt. See the beadwork on his moccasins? The design on his leggings? That is Paiute."

"What in the name of General Custer is a Paiute doing buried here in the Pinnacle Peak subdivision of Scottsdale, Arizona?" Cal asked, pushing back the black Stetson in a gesture of puzzlement.

Barry hated himself later for the show of greed, but at this moment he asked: "Is that worth something? I mean, the fact a Paiute is buried here. Does that make the stuff you found with him worth more?"

Cal stared at him for a long, unblinking moment. "Nope," was all he said at last.

"Probably less," Carlos added.

Barry was stung by his lack of knowledge, then he began to wonder if the two men were trying to con him. Maybe the find was really valuable, and they were attempting to downgrade it to avoid paying him much for the artifacts.

"It seems to me that anything that makes something really unique, like something that is out of place where one might expect it, just naturally becomes more valuable," Barry said, keeping his voice even, steady, like when he was closing a real-estate deal.

"It seems that way to you," Ed Gooch snarled from behind his black beard, "because you are a greenhorn what doesn't know shit about digging!"

Cal straightened to his full height in a rapid, fluid movement. "That'll be enough of that!" he snapped, shoving a forefinger under Gooch's nose. "This man is our host. And the owner of this land. You forget it once more and you ain't never digging with me again. Got it?"

Gooch's thick muscular arms crossed themselves defiantly across his broad chest. He was about six feet tall, well over two hundred pounds. He looked as though he loved brawling even more than rare steaks.

"Got it?" Hawkins raised his voice a bit louder and his finger two inches higher until the tip touched the

end of Gooch's nose. Cal was demanding verbal confirmation of his position as leader of the group.

"Got it." Gooch's lips had barely moved; his voice had been nothing more than a whispered mumble. But he had said the required words which would appease Cal Hawkins for the misdemeanor.

"What else we got in that pile of stuff?" Sam Henderson asked.

Barry noticed that Sam had arranged himself squarely behind Hawkins at the first sign of mutiny. Almost imperceptibly Dominguez and Ramon had flanked Gooch. Even the old desert rat Jake Hardesty had taken a firm grip on his spade handle.

Cal Hawkins was unquestionably the one who called all the shots in the group. The fact that he was well aware of the way things were quite likely added to his self-confidence in facing down a rough customer like Ed Gooch. Gooch was certain to know that to swing at Cal Hawkins would be to invite the four other men to jump him.

"Okay, amigo." Cal redirected his attention to the artifacts lying before him on the faded Indian blanket. "There's the eleven Navajo pots, the Medicine bag, the old Sharps, and a pile of bones wearing leather clothes. Folks, we got us some souvenirs, and that's about it."

"Shit," Gooch hitched his shoulders petulantly. "Ramon led us on a wild-goose chase. I shoulda spent the time working with Killer Crowbeak. We got us a big fight tonight."

"You and that damn rooster fightin' of yours," Kathy Miller scolded, her attractive features screwing themselves into an expression of extreme distaste. "Don't you know it's against the law to fight roosters!"

"Not in Arizona," Gooch grinned through the frame of moustache and beard. "And it's called *cock-fightin'*, Kathy. You really oughta come watch some time."

Cal sent Gooch a withering glance that told him to change the subject.

"So how're we going to divide it?" Gooch asked, looking away from Hawkins's narrowed eyes.

"What is there to divide eight ways?" Dominguez wanted to know. "Let Mr. Jacobs keep the stuff for his fireplace mantel."

Barry was becoming confused by the turn of the conversation. He assumed that all of the pieces would be going to a museum at the university. As the owner of the land on which the burial mound was found, he hoped to receive some financial compensation for permitting them to conduct the dig.

"But I don't quite understand," Barry put his doubt in words. "Isn't all this stuff going to the university to be studied and labeled and so on?"

Cal squinted up at him from where he again squatted next to the blanket. "The university?"

Gooch interrupted the exchange. "Hell, Cal, we can get good money for those pots. I surely am not in favor of letting the pilgrim here have them all."

"I agree with Ed that that is a mite too generous," Jake Hardesty said around the stem of his pipe.

Kathy Miller bent over the skeleton, smiled, and beckoned to Bobby. "Come see this old Indian, honey."

Bobby squeezed Barry's hand and looked up at him for some sign.

"If you want to, Bobby, go ahead."

Barry hoped that Carol wasn't watching through the bedroom curtains. She wouldn't want her son any closer than he already was to the white, dirt-streaked bones in the crinkled leather clothes. Barry found his own attention being steadily drawn to the gaping eye sockets and the bare, grinning teeth with a kind of morbid fascination. Bobby released his hand and walked to Kathy Miller.

"Okay, Cal, how do we split things?" Ed Gooch was persisting.

Cal shrugged, as though he were rapidly losing interest in the matter. "How's this sound? I'll take the old Sharps for my collection. No damned good, though, for anything other than hangin' above a fire-place. Sam and Merry take two pots. Jake takes the old Medicine bag. This valley was a hell of a lot drier before everyone started puttin' swimmin pools and irrigation ditches all over. The bag ain't in such bad shape."

Cal waited for Jake to accept or protest. The old man merely puffed his pipe.

Taking his silence as consent, Cal went on with the distribution. "Carlos takes two pots. Ramon gets two. Kathy gets one. And Ed, because you are such a miserable bitcher and whiner, you get four pots."

Ed's eyes rolled from Cal to each of the other members of the digging party.

"But," Cal added—and Ed looked as though he knew there was going to be a "but"—"you pay Mr. Jacobs here fifty dollars royalty."

"Fifty dollars!" Gooch protested. "God Awmighty, Cal!"

Barry shook his head in a vain attempt to free his brain from the confusion that had numbed it. Gooch was arguing against paying him fifty dollars. Barry had been thinking all afternoon that he would be receiving hundreds, maybe thousands, of dollars. And he still could not comprehend this talk of "dividing" the meager treasure the burial mound had produced.

"I'll pay him the fifty dollars, damn it to hell, Cal," Gooch glowered at the tall man before him.

And now he had a "but" for Hawkins: "But I want that skull. I can get good money for it. I know a dentist who's using one for an ashtray in his office, and he's got a friend who wants a skull and who will pay good money to get one."

"You know the rules, Ed," Cal said in a quiet, measured voice. "Professor Fredericks gets all the

bones and all the remains after we finish our grave robbing."

"Aren't . . . aren't *you* a professor, Cal?" Barry finally asked it.

The group all laughed at the unconscious and spontaneous joke that Barry had just uttered.

Barry felt himself getting red, short of breath, angry. "You aren't from the university?"

Cal pushed the black Stetson back from his forehead, turned to fix Ramon with one of his narrow-eyed gunfighter stares. "Ramon Quintana, what did you tell this man?"

Ramon laughed, shook his shanky black hair. "I only told him you were *like* a professor."

"And Cal *is* extremely knowledgeable about the American West and the American Indian traditions," Carlos Dominguez spoke up. "Perhaps he has made a greater study of these things than most of those professors with their doctorates."

"Mr. Barry Jacobs," Cal spoke in the voice one might use with a dull-witted child. "We are what is commonly known as pothunters. We dig up the pots and other artifacts to sell on an international market. There's a whole world that loves Indian pots and souvenirs."

"Is what you're doing against the law?" Barry demanded. "Because if it is . . ."

Cal put up a big palm as if he were a traffic policeman. "I'll tell you straight out, Barry. There's some who would like to make all digging against the law. It hasn't happened yet—unless you're desecrating sacred places on tribal land."

Carlos came in again, like Cal's backup man. "This is your land, Barry. And this is not a sacred tribal area."

Barry felt better, although he had been brought up to respect all burial grounds as holy places. Of course, this was not a Christian cemetery. And there could be little doubt that the Indian who had been buried

here had *not* been a Christian. Barry wasn't clear in his own mind whether a burial ground could ever be considered sacred or consecrated unless a minister or a priest had blessed it.

"Look at it this way, Barry," Cal was going on. "The whole damn state of Arizona is one big archaeological dig. The universities are stuffed with pots and bones. The Heard Museum has everything it could require to make it *the* American Indian museum in the world, probably."

Dominguez was prompt to take over again. "If someone from the university comes, he does not share this cultural find with the world. He puts it into a storeroom and lets it gather dust. It might be ten years before someone even looks at it and catalogs it."

Barry smiled wanly. "But *you* share the pots by selling them to collectors."

"And private museums of all kinds and types," Cal added with just a slight defensive tone.

Bobby had returned to Barry's side, holding aloft a beaded medallion for his father's inspection.

Cal turned to Kathy Miller, his knotted eyebrows nonverbally questioning her.

"It was around the skeleton's neck," she explained. "It makes a good souvenir for the kid. He can take it to school when he's older and tell the other kids about it. I explained to him how it is to the Indians like a Catholic wearing a crucifix."

Cal turned back to Barry and the boy. "That medallion was part of the old Indian's Medicine. Let the boy keep it."

Barry looked at the beaded circle of black, red, and yellow beads. The center reminded him of flower petals. A leather cord ran through a sewn flap on the back of the medallion. Barry felt revulsion. That medallion had lain about the neck of a rotting corpse.

"You may keep it, Bobby," he said, watching the boy's smile extend itself. "But it may be . . . kind

of dirty. We'll press it between two pieces of glass and put it up on the wall of your room."

Ed Gooch planted himself in front of Barry, fanned three tens and one twenty-dollar bill between his stumpy fingers. "Here's the fifty, Jacobs," he said, slapping the money into Barry's palm. "But, Cal, damn it! I'm taking that skull!"

Dominguez took up the argument. "Ed, we always follow the policy of notifying the academic boys about skeletal remains. We just take the pots. Things that might offer historical value, we always leave for Dr. Fredericks or a qualified person to examine."

Gooch was not to be dissuaded. "I'm taking the skull."

Cal tugged the black gloves tight around his knuckles. First the left hand, then the right. "Nope," he said, his voice as sharp and as final as the sound of a cocking hammer on a .45 revolver. "It's for Dr. Fredericks."

The stranger's voice that came from behind them startled everyone. "The bones of the old grandfather belong to no one. I have come to take them for sacred reburial."

Six

"Just like a goddamn buck to sneak up on a guy," Jake Hardesty grumbled. "Don't you never get tired of playing cowboys and Indians?"

The Indian ignored the old man's sarcastic complaint. He was about five foot eleven, maybe one hundred and eighty pounds, compactly built. Although he was dressed in a plaid shirt, blue jeans, and cowboy boots, he wore a beaded medallion about his neck and carried a Medicine bag on his hip. Barry guessed that he was about forty years old.

"Who invited you here, chief?" Ed Gooch sneered, his big hands balling themselves into angry fists.

Cal leaned back on his bootheels and regarded the stranger quietly.

"Do you know this man, Barry?" Carlos Dominguez asked.

Barry shook his head. "No. No, I don't."

"I am Don Red Fox," the Indian announced by way of introduction. "I am gathering all remains of the grandfather's so that they might have sacred and respectful burial."

"By what authority are you here, Red Fox?" Cal wanted to know. "And how did you find out about this burial site?"

Ramon snapped his fingers with a curse. "It's that goddamn Luis! Sure, he's part Navajo. He told this bastard about the dig. I'll break his goddamn face!"

"It is unimportant how I learned of your disturbing of the grandfather's resting place," Red Fox said. "I have come to take the remains with me."

Ed Gooch swelled his chest and stretched himself to full height. For a moment he reminded Barry of a gamecock, the kind that Gooch had declared that he raised to fight for bloody sport.

"Them remains are mine, chief," Gooch threatened. "You try and take 'em, and I'll have two skulls to sell!"

Barry had no doubt that Gooch would enforce his threat. Don Red Fox seemed unperturbed.

"Careful, Gooch," Sam Henderson taunted him. "He might be another Billy Jack. You know, a master of *aikido*. He might reach up and kick *your* head off."

Barry knew that Henderson referred to the character in a popular movie about a half-breed Indian who righted wrongs with his mastery of martial arts.

"I practice no violence," Red Fox assured them.

"I do!" Gooch roared, taking several menacing steps toward the man. It was apparent that he had expected Red Fox to run. Gooch stood, waving his thick arms in the manner of one trying to frighten a dog away from his yard.

"I want no trouble," Red Fox said. "I want only to take the grandfather with me."

"Is it really his grandpa?" Merry Henderson scowled. "How can he tell? There wasn't any marker on the grave."

Sam laughed. "That's the way traditional Indians talk about the dead and old people they respect."

"You never answered my question about authority, Red Fox," Cal reminded him. "What gives you the right to come barging in here on Mr. Jacobs's

property? You Indians don't own this land anymore, you know."

Don Red Fox smiled. "We Indians never did own the land. No one can own the Earth Mother. One can only love her and respect her."

"Hey, that's pretty," Kathy Miller said and got a mean glance from Cal as her reward.

"I have no legal authority, my brother," Red Fox admitted. "But I am part of a committee that is asking museums and others to return the bones of our people for proper burial. We care nothing about pots and tomahawks. Only the bones."

Red Fox managed to get by Gooch without the man pummeling him. He walked to the side of the skeletal remains and knelt beside the blanket.

"This is a Ghost Shirt," Red Fox said in amazement, displaying the first sign of emotion since he entered Jacobs's backyard. Then, his voice even once again, he went on: "This grandfather is not Hopi or Navajo or any other of the local tribes. He is Paiute."

"You have a good eye, Red Fox," Cal offered a begrudging compliment. "Most modern Indians don't know as much about the tribes of their people than does an eagle-rank boy scout."

"I am a traditional Mesquakie," Red Fox said. "We keep our old ways strong in our settlement. But I have studied the ways of all the red brothers."

"You've come all the way from Io-way," Cal shook his head in disbelief. "You've come from the Mesquakie settlement in Io-way?"

Red Fox nodded, his attention riveted by the Ghost Shirt. "Who was this grandfather to have come here to die?"

"He's going to be the headless horseman, chief," Gooch snorted, "'cause I'm taking his head to sell."

"I cannot permit you to do such sacrilege, brother," Don Red Fox said as he kept his eyes on the skeleton beside him.

"You ain't *my* brother, chief!" Gooch shouted. "Now step aside. I'm taking that head."

"We are all brothers, whether you recognize it or not," Red Fox told him, rising slowly to his feet.

"Ed," Cal warned the burly man, "you know the rules. You know who gets all our skeletons."

"Goddamn it, Cal." Gooch spun to face him. "This was such a damn lousy dig. I gotta have something to show for my time. 'Specially since I had to pay Jacobs fifty bucks!"

Gooch's neck was bulging with angry veins, and the red was rising in the exposed cheeks above the beard.

"You'll make it back on the pots," Cal said, standing his ground.

"F'Christ's sakes, Cal," Jake Hardesty growled, "let the whinin' sumbitch have the head. Let him take the skull, and then let us never see his miserable face around us ever again."

"Let him have four pots *plus* the head?" Dominguez challenged the old man's reasoning.

"I'll take one pot and the head," Gooch bargained. "You can divide the other three any way you want."

Barry could not stand in silence any longer. "Hey," he raised his hand for attention. "This is my property. I think I should have some say in all this."

"I gave you fifty dollars, pilgrim!" Gooch reminded him with a threatening growl.

"Have your say," Hawkins agreed.

"Well, what about Professor Fredericks?" Barry asked, feeling heavy beads of sweat massing on his forehead.

The tension in the backyard was becoming more electric by the moment. It seemed as though a brawl might break out at the first misplaced word or misdirected gesture.

"I mean, isn't that a good rule you've been following?" Barry questioned. "Being mindful of the heritage of the state and so forth."

It seemed as if Cal Hawkins was suddenly changing

horses in the middle of the stream. "In point of fact, Barry, Fredericks has more bones and skulls than he knows what to do with. Do you want the skull for yourself? Is that it?"

Barry shook his head vehemently. "No way! No way would I have that thing in my house!"

As if to corroborate his stepfather's response, Bobby made a sound as though he were clearing his throat. "Yecchh!" the boy spat, shaking his head for emphasis.

Kathy Miller laughed. "I don't blame you, boy! I wouldn't want it neither."

"I do not want him for myself," Don Red Fox said. "But I must take the grandfather for sacred burial."

Without another word Ed Gooch struck Red Fox full in the face. The Mesquakie staggered back several steps, but he did not fall.

Gooch moved in close, slammed two vicious punches, a left and a right, into Red Fox's stomach. The Mesquakie doubled over, and Gooch brought his knee up to smash his victim's face. Red Fox's body straightened from the cruel knee uppercut, his nose bleeding. He took one backward step and his knees buckled.

Gooch drew his fist back to deliver another punch to the face, but Barry instinctively hooked his own bent arm around Gooch's cocked elbow, twisted him backward, and sent him sprawling into the dirt.

"That was one bad mistake, pilgrim," Gooch warned Barry, a strange smile moving beneath the black beard. "I'm gonna beat the living shit outa you!"

"Sam! Ramon!" Cal barked the order. "Stop that stupid bastard."

It was obvious that Ramon loved a heated brawl as much as Gooch did. The stocky Mexican threw himself on the sprawled Gooch and slammed a balled right fist into his face at the same time that the tall, thin Sam Henderson dropped his bony knees on Ed's

arms, pinning them to the ground. Ramon's heavy knuckles slammed a second time into Gooch's face.

Ramon straddled Ed's chest. Henderson's full weight, focused on his knees, held fast Gooch's arms.

Ramon raised his fist high into the air. "You want one more, *hermano*?" the Chicano grinned, spittle dripping between his gap teeth onto Gooch's throat.

"I'll kill you, you dumb greaser!" Gooch gasped his defiance.

Ramon brought the fist down with gusto. He looked up at Cal and shrugged. "The bastard wanted one more."

Henderson hoisted the dazed man to his feet and twisted his arms behind his back. Gooch's beard was flecked with blood. His eyes were glazed.

"Jake, take your shovel and decapitate that skull," Cal told the old man.

"No, you must not do this," Don Red Fox said. Blood was flowing freely from both nostrils. Merry Henderson had offered him some tissues, but it was as if he did not see her.

"You must not separate the grandfather's head from his body!"

Red Fox got weakly to his feet and began moving toward the skeleton.

"Hey, there, Mr. Red Fox," Cal warned him. "Don't you interfere with our business no more. No one invited you here. You're a trespasser on Mr. Jacobs's land."

Red Fox staggered to the blanket, positioned himself between Jake Hardesty and the skeleton. Jake raised his shovel, as if it were rifle and bayonet, and pointed the tip at Red Fox's throat.

"Step aside, chief," Jake warned, "or it'll be your head I hand to that dumb bastard."

Carlos Dominguez grabbed Red Fox from behind and pulled him away.

"Stop it!" Dominguez snapped at the struggling

Mesquakie. "You don't stop it, and Ramon will use you for a punching bag!"

"Wait!" Barry shouted.

But it was too late. In one quick, neat thrust Jake parted the dried sinew from the vertebra, and the skull rolled onto one side. Hooking two fingers in the eye sockets and a thumb in the nose aperture, Jake hoisted the skull as if it were a grisly bowling ball.

"Listen, Gooch," Cal advised in a measured, cool voice. Ed Gooch stood with his arms still pinned by Sam Henderson. He was dazed but fully aware of what was being said to him. He was also mindful of Ramon Quintana standing at his side, almost eager to smash another fist into his face.

"There's your damn skull," Cal went on, the Stetson low over his forehead. "You get no pot, man. None at all. Just your goddamn skull."

Cal nodded and Henderson released Gooch's arms. Ed shrugged his shoulders, then put a forefinger in his mouth to test a tooth. He glowered at a happily smiling Ramon.

"Here's your toy, you dumb bastard," Jake said as he handed the trophy to Gooch.

"And you remember the other condition that old Jake suggested should we let you have your way and get the skull," Cal continued.

"What other condition?" Gooch frowned, his fingers moving greedily around the prize he had so desperately sought.

"The other condition being," Cal supplied for Gooch's memory, "that we never see your ugly bearded face on any other dig that we ever conduct—ever. We just had a unanimous vote, Ed, and we're through with you."

Gooch lowered his head and spat between his boots. The spittle was bright with blood. "That's fine with me. I can find plenty of good digs on my own."

Jake laughed derisively. "You couldn't find your own pecker in the dark!"

"You dumb old fart," Gooch's temper flared. "I'm as good in the desert as you are!"

Jake laughed even louder. "Never go in the desert, Ed. Least ways not alone. You're so stupid you'd never find your way out, and I don't want any desert being stunk up by your rotting carcass."

Gooch took a step toward Hardesty, but Ramon moved between them and pushed a thick palm against the younger man's chest. "Wave bye-bye, Ed," Ramon told him. "Take Geronimo's skull and leave."

Gooch smiled weakly, tried for a noncaring shrug. "I don't need you jerks," he sneered. "I got other things to do that will make me rich."

"Like fighting that fancy rooster of yours?" Sam Henderson chuckled.

"Old Chicken Ed," Ramon snorted. He flapped his arms up and down, clucked a few times like a hen looking for an egg to hatch, then he began to chant: "Chick-chick-chicken Ed! Chich-chick-chicken Ed! Chick-chick-chic. . ."

Ed Gooch turned angrily away from the taunting Ramon and strode purposefully toward the gate. He did not turn around for his parting shot until he stood in the open gateway.

"I don't need any of you in my life. Stay the hell away from me. Don't never come messing around me, or I'll kill you."

He held the skull triumphantly in the air. "I can make it a hell of a lot better on my own. Killer Crow-beak is gonna make me a mint. Pretty soon I won't even have to be a goddamn grave robber like you creeps!"

Seven



Cal Hawkins and his band of pothunters took the Navajo pottery, the rusty Sharps buffalo rifle, the Medicine bag, and the moccasins. They left Barry with a headless skeleton, a hole in his backyard, their apologies for having made such a ruckus, and a Mesquakie Indian with a bloody nose.

"I'll call Professor Fredericks tonight," Cal had told Barry just before he and Kathy got into the '78 Cadillac Eldorado. "He just might be interested in lookin' at that Ghost Shirt and the beads we left on the leather clothes. It don't matter that the skeleton ain't got any head."

Don Red Fox had accepted some of Merry Henderson's tissues, and he sat silently beside the skeleton, stemming the flow of blood from his nose.

Bobby had gone into the house, and Barry knew that it would not be long before Carol would be coming to inspect the yard and to inquire as to how well they had done financially. Barry hoped she wasn't in one of her critical moods. She could, at times, be a formidable authority figure—especially when she was one step removed from the situation in question.

Don was shaking his head sadly. He spoke softly in words which Barry could not understand. Then he

cleared his throat and spoke again. "Well, nameless grandfather," he sighed. "I blew it. I let a paleface take another scalp—or skull, in this case."

"Would you like a drink?" Barry offered. But then he remembered that Indians were not supposed to be able to hold their liquor. Firewater made them go crazy. "Like a cup of coffee, I mean."

Don Red Fox looked up at Barry and smiled wistfully. He had rolled up some tissue into a thin rope and wadded it up one of his nostrils to serve as a plug against the flow of blood. The front of his shirt had been ripped open, and he would have a nasty bruise on one cheekbone.

"I would like a cup of coffee, Mr. Jacobs," Red Fox nodded. "That would be kind of you."

"Barry. It's Barry Jacobs," he said, extending his hand to the Mesquakie.

Red Fox studied the tanned, white hand for a moment as if it were some alien object. Then he smiled, squeezed his fingers around Barry's wrist, permitted the white man to pull him to his feet.

"I'm sorry that maniac piled into you the way he did," Barry said.

Red Fox's eyes saddened. "It was a bad thing he did. Taking the old one's skull, I mean. By the way," he added, "I was falling back on my can, but I saw you trip him or toss him or something."

Barry looked toward the back door from which he expected Carol to emerge at any moment. "I used to wrestle in high school and a little in college. I studied one of the martial arts for a bit, and I just remembered one of the moves."

"I'm glad you did."

Barry grinned self-consciously. "I was lucky it worked. It was Cal sending Ramon and Henderson after Gooch that really stopped things."

"Yeah, but they couldn't have got to him before he landed that roundhouse right directly into my face, man!"

Carol was opening the back door, but Barry wanted to ask Red Fox a question before she got to them.

"Red Fox, why didn't you defend yourself? I mean, I know Gooch took you off guard, but his punch didn't knock you down. You seemed to recover. Why didn't you fight back?"

Red Fox was watching Carol approach them. "My way is one of peace. I do not engage in physical violence."

"Then it was a good thing there were some guys around who *did* believe in physical violence, or Gooch would have killed you."

"My Medicine will always protect me. It will send spirit helpers or enter men and animals to see that no harm befalls me."

Carol had showered, shampooed, and dried her hair. She had changed into a low-cut, red peasant blouse and white slacks. Although the sun was beginning to set, the temperature was still over one hundred degrees; and Carol always dressed for comfort.

Carol arched a quizzical eyebrow at the sight of the bloodied Mesquakie.

"This is Don Red Fox," Barry introduced them. "Don, this is my wife Carol."

Red Fox nodded. "I'm pleased to meet you, Mrs. Jacobs."

"What on earth happened to you, Mr. Fox?" Carol's teeth twisted her lower lip, and she frowned in concern over the bruise and the bloody nose. "Barry," her tone was sharp, "what went on in our backyard?"

"I had an ideological disagreement with the pothunters who were unearthing the grandfather—the body—in the burial mound," Red Fox spoke up.

Carol's sympathy was less apparent. "Barry, is Mr. Fox one of those Indian militants?"

Barry had often wondered if Carol's occasional tendency to speak about someone as if that person

weren't standing before her was a tactic that she had practiced to advantage in her real-estate dealings.

Once again Red Fox took Barry off the hook.

"My name is Don *Red Fox*," the Mesquakie corrected her gently, "but please call me Don. I am a traditional Indian, who still practices the ancient spiritual beliefs of our people. There are pockets of traditional Indians scattered throughout this country from coast to coast, Mrs. Jacobs. I am part of a committee seeking to secure the return of all the skeletons of the Native People from all museums. I sought to prevent the pothunters from profaning the remains of the grandfather who slept in what is left of that burial mound."

Don gestured to the violated mound, and Carol found herself staring blankly at the hole.

"Who," she said after a few moments reverie, "are these 'pothunters' you keep referring to? Barry, I thought those people were from the university in Tempe."

"It appears that Ramon snookered us, babe," Barry explained. "His contact was not with a university professor but with a man who digs up Indian pots and sells them on a kind of black-market system."

Carol's green eyes were cool, like the tips of icicles. "How much money did we get?"

Barry handed her the crumpled fifty dollars that he had still held in his right palm. The bills were moist with his sweat. "Fifty bucks happens to be our share of the illegal transaction."

Carol arched a blond eyebrow, which had been made darker by skillful applications of makeup. "That's all?"

"There was hardly anything at all in the grave," Barry said, shifting his weight uneasily. "Just the skeleton and a few pots. That was part of the reason the fight started."

Carol glanced from Don Red Fox's bloody nose to the harvested burial mound. "But the skeleton is still

here. Didn't they want it? Or did Mr. Red Fox win the fight?"

She stepped cautiously next to the skeleton as if she feared that it might suddenly sit up and grab her.

"Oh, yecch!" She had finally noticed the decapitation. "Someone took his head off!"

"And the skull of that poor grandfather will end up on somebody's mantel with a candle stuck on its top," Red Fox complained bitterly. "Or maybe some creep will saw off the top part and use the skull as an ashtray. I've even seen Indian skulls in the back windows of cars with red and green lights in the eye sockets. Those unfeeling people were using the skull of a grandfather for a directional signal."

Carol could not suppress the shudder that seized her shoulders.

Red Fox nodded in silent agreement to her instantly translatable body language. "Now you can understand why I wanted to take the skeleton to a sacred burial place."

"Aren't you still going to take the skeleton away from here?" Carol asked. "I don't want that thing in our backyard! I won't sleep with that thing out here!"

Red Fox looked at Barry. "With your permission I will be pleased to take the body of the grandfather with me."

"Yeah, but, Red Fox," Barry reminded him, "Cal said that he was calling that Professor Fredericks from the university. He said something about the shirt and some of the beadwork making the skeleton's presence here in Arizona somehow unique. Don't you think it would be best if the professor had a chance to study it first? I mean, before you took it."

Red Fox wadded the moist tissue he had been holding to his nose. The bleeding seemed to have stopped.

"According to words on a sheet of paper, you feel that you own this small part of the Earth Mother's

body," Red Fox answered him. "If you do not give me permission to take the bones with me, the same law that gave you that sheet of paper will put me in jail for stealing from you."

"When is this professor supposed to make his grand entrance?" Carol asked.

"Cal said that he would call him tonight and that the professor should be here in the morning," Barry told her.

Carol shook her head emphatically. "Let Red Fox take the bones. I don't want to look outside tonight and see that skeleton lying here."

"I'll cover it with that old tarp we've got in the garage," Barry said. He turned to face Don. "I really think it is best if the professor has a chance to examine the skeleton before you take it. I promise that I'll see to it that you get the remains after the man has looked it over."

Don Red Fox smiled wryly. "How forked is your tongue, white man?"

"Seriously, Don," Barry protested the barb. "I'll arrange to have those remains given to you."

Red Fox nodded, his face suddenly assuming the classic attitude of the stoical red man. Then he smiled broadly.

"You know, Barry," he began, "someday I'm going to collect a carload or two of young Indian archaeological students. We're going to drive down to Tombstone, Arizona, with our shovels, picks, and spades. Then we're going to start to dig up Boot Hill.

"When the good citizens of Tombstone arrive to protest, we're going to tell them that we are engaged in a serious archaeological, anthropological dig. We want to see how the early settlers in Arizona really lived. Did they have rickets? Did they die of venereal disease? What did their religious ceremonies place in their burial boxes? How many were shot to death in front, and how many were shot to death in the back?"

Don Red Fox paused to permit the image to soak

down to the deeper reaches of their brains and their souls. "How," he asked, "do you think the white man would like the idea of Indians digging up his dead?"

"I'm sorry," Barry said, trying to soften his decision with a smile. "I really feel that I am doing what is right. I understand the point of your little story, Don. And I will keep my promise."

"Well, Grandfather," Red Fox addressed the mute bones. "We've waited nearly four hundred years for a white man to keep a promise to us. What's a few days more?"

Eight



It was a terrible act that the white man did to the bones. It made the Thing that is Everything and No Thing very angry. If it had been dark, I know the Chindi would have torn the white man to pieces.

It is hard for me to understand where I am.

I know that I can no longer walk the Earth Mother as a man, but I am somehow forbidden to join the grandfathers and grandmothers in the Land of the Spirits. It is as if I am shackled to the Chindi that the Navajo healer left to guard me. It seems that we must stay forever joined until he returns to separate us.

I keep seeing the twisted bodies of the Sioux frozen in the snow.

I wish that Wovoka, the One With the Morning Star on His Head, would have understood why I did what I did—why I told Sitting Bull that the Ghost Shirts would turn the yellow legs' bullets to water. I knew that the white man must be conquered with death, not with love!

I was there on the day when Wovoka awakened from the dead. His wife, Mary, had permitted those closest to him to test his flesh with fire and knife.

He was dead. He had fallen when the Sky Monster ate the sun. We fired our guns at the Sky Monster to

make it spit out the sun; and, at last, it became light again. The sun lived, but Wovoka did not. He had gone to his lodge, stretched out on his furs and hides, and died.

When Wovoka returned to life after many days of death, he told us that he had been with God. He told us that the world, just as the sun, just as Wovoka, would die. But no Indian should be afraid, for the world would come alive again, just as the sun, just as Wovoka, had come alive again.

Wovoka said that the earth would die like a brave warrior. Thunders would come. The earth would begin to shake. Smoke would come out of the earth. Lightning would crash all around.

All Indians should go to the high country to await the Earth Mother's death in safety. All the white men who did not believe, along with all Indians who did not believe, would be swept off the face of the earth.

Wovoka said that the Old Man, the spirit captain whom people call God, told him that all the grandfathers and grandmothers in the Other World were waiting to be reborn in the New World. All Indians and good whites would be reborn without disease or pain.

The grasses would be high again. All the animals would come back again. And to help the New World to be born, we were to dance the Ghost Dance that Wovoka had shown us before. The Old Man had told him that we must dance.

So I showed the Ghost Dance to the Sioux and told them that the dance would drive the white man back into the oceans.

When I returned from Wounded Knee, Wovoka was sad because of what I had done. He said:

"I have told you that you are to do harm to no one! Moon Bear, you have done harm.

"I have told you that the Old Man wants us never to tell lies. Moon Bear, you have told a terrible lie

that has caused the deaths of many of our Sioux brothers.

"I have told you to do right always. You have done wrong.

"I have told you never to fight, not even against the white man! Moon Bear, it is for the Old Man to deal with the white man. We are only to dance and be faithful to my vision of the Old Man's truth."

The Paiutes who had been to the white man's church said that Wovoka glowed like Jesus. When I tried to kill Wovoka, they said that I was a sinner like Judas.

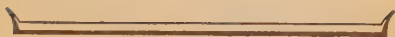
The Chindi is pulling me.

It is dark. Someone has covered the bones. The Chindi is angry. I must go with it.

There is nothing that I can do to stop it.

I feel as though I am tied to a wind, a death wind.

Nine



“Fighting gamecocks is a part of Arizona’s history and the Southwestern life style. George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and other important figures in American history enjoyed the sport. Abe Lincoln had even acted as a referee at some fights.”

That was part of a whole speech that Ed Gooch had memorized to spiel out to anyone who hassled him about fighting gamecocks. Every once in a while some dude at a bar or at work would say something about cockfighting being inhumane. If the guy wasn’t too big, Ed would challenge him to step outside. If he looked too mean, Ed would lay the defense speech on him.

Damn the goody-goodies, the reformers, the faggots, the hippies, and the smart-ass eastern pilgrims who kept trying to get the state legislature to pass laws against cockfighting.

That night Killer Crowbeak had done real good. The big black rooster had jumped high and strong, and the three-inch slashers that Ed had tied to his legs had let him make chickenburger out of the big red rooster who had opposed him. Killer Crowbeak put his opponent down in five minutes.

Ed had rubbed the bruise beneath his left eye when

Killer Crowbeak drew the first blood, and he thought of Cal Hawkins.

When Killer Crowbeak slashed deep and the blood spurted, he had thought of Sam Henderson.

And when the triumphant rooster pecked out his opponent's eye, Ed had thought of Ramon Quintana.

Cockfighting was a great release for a man, no question about it.

"Hey, Gooch," laughed someone who had bet on Killer Crowbeak as he slapped Ed on the back. "Ol' Killer's gonna be ready for the Copper State meet next May!"

Ed smiled. The Copper State meet was Arizona's Super Bowl of cockfighting.

The fight had earned him a couple of bucks over three hundred dollars. Screw digging up pots and bones!

"You gonna fight Killer again tonight?" a fat man sour with sweat asked him.

Ed shook his head. "No more tonight. I'm savin' him for tomorrow night at Squeaky's."

Squeaky Silverman had a real amphitheater when he shut down his tire-balancing business and converted the garage into a cockfighting arena. Squeaky's fight always drew the big-money boys. Tonight's contest had been held in a tent behind the Risqué Roadrunner Bar.

Ed had worked up a thirst in the heat of the September night. The temperature still had to be in the nineties. And the fighting and the blood had made him horny as hell.

"Hey, Merle," he called to a short, bald-headed man who was mopping his gleaming skull with a red handkerchief. "Is Smitty working at Risky's tonight?"

Sandra "Smitty" Schmidt was a bosomy, bleached-blond cocktail waitress whom Ed had found to be an enthusiastic participant in another kind of cockfighting.

The short man examined his damp handkerchief

before he replaced it in the pocket of his soiled white trousers. "Yeah," he said with little interest. "She was there a half hour ago when I went for a beer."

Smitty had agreed to spend the night with Ed two or three times in the past. He hoped that she would be agreeable tonight.

Since man's earliest history a warrior craved a woman after a bloody fight. While it was true that Killer Crowbeak was the one who was actually mixing it up with an enemy, Ed had so identified with the gamecock that he had vicariously savored the sweet juices of triumphant combat.

Ed left the tent behind the bar and placed Killer in his wire cage underneath the tarp of the pickup. Gooch carefully peeled back the canvas so that Killer would have plenty of air. He poured the rooster a pan of fresh water and sprinkled a handful of cracked corn in a lidless sardine can.

"You got a hen waitin' for you at home, Killer," he told the gamecock in a tone of shared confidence. "You just gotta be patient now so I can see if I can get a hen for me."

Ed pushed open the door of the Risqué Roadrunner and let the blast from the air conditioner wash over him like water from a cool mountain stream.

"Here comes another champion," cackled an old-timer from the bar, raising a glass retaining little more than flecks of foam. "His cock tore hell out of the other one. Hail the victor!"

Ed grinned. "Pour old Roy a fresh, cool one," he told the bartender. Gooch knew that was how old Roy cadged drinks, but it was worth it to have had him announce Killer Crowbeak's triumph to those in the bar within earshot.

Willie Nelson was on the jukebox, as he would be half the night. Ed liked that Texas outlaw music, but he preferred the somebody-done-somebody-wrong kind of songs.

Pretty soon he would walk over and punch Tammy

Wynette's, "Stand by Your Man." It was an old song, but as long as he had heard it, Ed had never found a woman who would consider him her man to stand by for longer than a month or two.

He found a table toward the back of the room where he liked best to sit. Its round top was littered with half a dozen empty beer glasses, a couple of Coors bottles, and an ashtray full of butts; but he figured whoever had cluttered the table had finished and gone.

The smoke in the place was thicker than a barbecue pit with hog fat dripping on the coals.

Smitty was hustling across the floor with a tray of drinks balanced expertly in her right hand. There appeared to be only two other girls working the place tonight, so she was really bouncing her bottom to keep up with the thirsty crowd from the cockfight.

Smitty had great legs, and they always looked terrific in the black net stockings she wore on the job. Some guys said her rear was too broad, but Ed liked a woman with a full tail. He had found out in the most reliable way that her platinum blond hair was really a kind of tawny brown, but she looked sharp with all that hair piled up on top of her head. Smitty might not be the prettiest woman in Phoenix, but she had a great body.

Her brown eyes widened when she saw him. Ed liked that a lot. It was a good omen.

"Hey, babe," she called across the room. "I hear Killer carved up his man tonight." Ed liked the second announcement of Killer's victory, too.

She said she would be with him in a minute. But before she got there, Bobby Lee Huber was pulling back a chair at Ed's table.

Ed felt an unwanted tension. He had met Cal Hawkins through Bobby Lee, and he wondered if Bobby Lee had heard about their fight.

But Bobby Lee was smiling as he sat down. "Real

good job old Killer did tonight, man," Bobby Lee said. "You done real good training that bird."

Ed shrugged, hoping to look modest and indifferent. "Got some good cocks coming up, too."

"So I hear tell," Bobby nodded. He leaned conspiratorially across the table and whispered, "You want some action tonight?"

Ed raised an eyebrow. Bobby Lee's taste in women ran a bit to the coarse and vulgar as far as Gooch was concerned.

Kris Kristofferson's gravel tones had replaced Willie's on the jukebox. Kris's dark-eyed wife, Rita Coolidge, was joining him in a duet.

"Look yonder, two tables left of the jukebox. I got me an extra bimbo tonight. Ginny's girl friend from El Paso. Help me out, huh?"

Ed followed the directions. The brunette was a bit rangy, but she wasn't bad.

"She's kinda dark, Bobby Lee. She a Mex'can?"

"Don't think so. Why?" Bobby Lee winked. "Would it bother you if you got her under the sheets?"

Ed grinned and pushed a couple of empty bottles aside with the edge of his hand. "I don't like working with wetbacks, but I don't mind screwin' them."

Bobby laughed a lot louder than the comment deserved. "I know what you mean. Dark meat is as tasty as white, 'specially *in* the dark."

"But," Ed said after Bobby Lee had finished laughing at his own joke, "I wanna make it with Smitty tonight."

"I heard you like that stuff. You got it set?" Bobby Lee asked.

"Nope," Ed had to admit. "Not yet."

Bobby Lee shrugged. "Well, if she is fool enough to turn you down, you remember Maria over there."

"Maria?" Ed questioned as Bobby Lee was getting up to leave his table. "Then she must be Mex'can."

Bobby Lee shook his head. "Eye-talian, I think.

We'll be here for 'nother forty minutes or so. Don't say I never offered you a good thing."

"You're all heart, my man," Ed acknowledged.

Then Smitty was at his table, picking up the dead soldiers, empty glasses, cigarette butts, and putting them on her tray.

"What can I do you for, Big Ed?" Her smile was a beautiful invitation to stand up and kiss her.

"You can do a *whole lot* for me, babe," he winked. "You can do me like you done before."

Smitty set the tray down on an edge of the table, pushed an errant strand of platinum hair away from her left eye. "Feelin' kind of cocky after your big win, is that it?"

Ed reached in his pocket and pulled out the roll of bills. "Nothing like a wad of green to make a man feel like king of the world. What time you get off work?"

Smitty looked over her shoulder to the spot where Leroy Cunningham, the bouncer, was leaning against the wall, his big, short-sleeved arms folded confidently across his barrel chest. Ed knew that Smitty and Leroy made it from time to time. Damn! Maybe Leroy had staked out a steady claim on her. Ed glanced over at Bobby Lee, Ginny, and Maria. Maria was looking better.

Smitty smiled, her eyes flickering from the roll in Ed's hands to his narrowed eyes above the black, bushy beard. "I get off 'bout one tonight. Think a man with a hot roll burning his hands can set around that long?"

"If he knows there's gonna be a payoff, a man can wait a long time," Ed told her, laying his need right out front before her.

Smitty caught the meaning. "If that man has won once tonight, there's no reason why he shouldn't score again."

Ed grinned and leaned back comfortably in his chair. "How about a Coors while I'm waitin'?"



Ed had put away a six-pack before Smitty came to his table and told him she was ready. She had changed out of her cocktail dress and net stockings into a short red skirt and a white blouse cut low enough to show off her full breasts. She looked damn nice.

With just enough beer in him to feel gallant, he walked Smitty to the passenger side of the pickup, unlocked the door, and helped her into the cab.

"What's wrapped up in the blanket?" she asked him after he had pulled out of the Risqué Roadrunner's parking lot and had maneuvered the pickup into the traffic flow.

Feeling ornery, Ed told her to unwrap it and see for herself.

"Oh, Jesus Christ!" she screamed as she unpeeled the blanket from the skull. The empty sockets and the grinning teeth were eerily shadowed by the lights from the dashboard.

Smitty tossed the blanket back around the skull, dropped it heavily to the floorboard, moved her legs as far away from the object as she could in the nearness of the cab.

"You sonuvabitch!" she cursed at Ed.

"Careful how you handle that, babe!" Ed warned her around his roar of laughter. "That old Indian's empty head is gonna made me a wad of money."

Smitty shuddered and made a grimace of extreme distaste. "Cockfightin' is bad enough, you bastard! How can you go around diggin' up graves?"

Ed frowned and jerked the steering wheel to move around a slow-moving station wagon—four sleepy kids sprawled in the back and two harried parents slumped together in the front seat.

"Indians didn't get no Christian burial," he told Smitty. "It ain't the same as digging up whites' graves. Unearthing an Indian's burial place ain't no

worse than digging up an animal what got covered by a landslide or something."

"A human skull is a human skull," Smitty argued.

"But *that* ain't human," Ed glowered at her, signaling the end of the argument. "That's Indian!"

They drove most of the remainder of the fifteen-minute ride in a state of uneasy truce. Finally Smitty turned the radio to KQYT, an easy-listening station, and the soft music seemed to soothe Ed's savagery. He slipped an arm around Smitty's shoulders and pulled her to him. She sat firm at first, but then she gave in and snuggled against his chest.

Ed still lived in the stucco ranch-style home in which he had resided since he was thirteen, when he, his mom and dad, and his brother Pete, moved there from Kearney, Nebraska. That had been twenty-three years ago. Pete had been snuffed in 'Nam. Dad died in '73, Mom in '76. The insurance money was all but gone. Ed supplemented his inheritance with odd jobs, mostly on construction. But it didn't matter. Killer Crowbeak was going to make him rich.

"I gotta put Killer to bed before we go in the house," Ed said as he pushed open the pickup door. "Wanna come in and see my other roosters?"

"Sure," Smitty said compliantly. "Got any new albums?"

"Got the new Dolly Parton," he said as he hoisted Killer's cage from under the buttoned-down tarp. "And a good old Nashville Brass."

"How about the Bee Gees?"

"Naw. Hell, that's kid disco music."

"Well," Smitty protested, "I'm just a kid."

"Hell," Ed snorted as he set Killer's cage down so he could unlock the garage door. "You're thirty if you're a day."

"I'm thirty-one," Smitty tilted her chin defiantly. "That's still young. I'm younger than you, anyway."

Ed found the light switch. "Next off you'll be telling me that you're still a virgin."

"No need to be insultin,'" she reprimanded him as she followed him inside the close garage, heavy with the reek of chicken dung, cracked corn and mash, and moist feathers.

"Whew," she said. "You better open some windows."

The six roosters in their cages were open-beaked, panting.

"I got the windows open as much as I dare," Ed explained. "I can't open 'em too much or some damn cat or friggin' rat will come sneakin' in and try to get at my cocks."

Ed set Killer Crowbeak's cage in what he deemed the coolest corner of the garage.

"The way Killer keeps winnin'," he told Smitty, "I'll soon be able to afford air conditioning in here."

Ed swept an arm toward the other gamecocks. "And ain't there some rugged-looking devils comin' up to carry on the Gooch winning tradition?"

Smitty shook her head in bewilderment. "Does this really turn you on, Ed? I mean, how can you get a buzz out of watching roosters fight? It seems cruel to me, makin' those birds fight."

"It ain't cruel!" Ed snapped. "Nobody makes cocks fight. It's their nature. The good Lord made them that way."

Smitty just looked at him, unconvinced.

"Now you know those guys who fight dogs," Ed reminded her.

Smitty's eyes widened in horror and she sighed. "I can't stand to even serve those creeps. I hope you're not going to defend dogfighting, too!"

Ed shook his head vigorously. "No siree. Dogfighting is inhumane. It's sickening. I don't see how anyone could get their kicks out of dogfighting. And dope, crime, prostitution gets wrapped up in dogfighting."

Ed picked up one of the other cock's cages for emphasis. "But you see, dogs are tame, domesticated.

Normally dogs don't fight each other. One rolls over and shows his belly, and the other leaves him alone. Dogs have to be starved and beaten to fight each other in the pit."

He put his forefinger into the cage, and the white rooster inside pecked him. "These mean bastards, on the other hand, sure as hell ain't tame or domesticated. They live for fighting. They'll fight and fight and fight and keep on fightin' long after their survival is down the tubes. They never quit. Never surrender. The good Lord just made them fighters."

The white rooster suddenly stiffened, and its eyes glazed over in a peculiar manner. A weird wheezing sound come from its beak.

Ed frowned his bafflement, and Smitty asked him: "What's wrong with him? His eyes just went dead."

Before Ed could answer, the door at the top of the gamecock's cage burst open; and the rooster was transformed into a furious mass of ruffled feathers, pecking beak, and raking talons. Ed dropped the cage when the bird flew into his face.

Smitty screamed as the embattled man beat the cock back with his hands. He was bleeding from a nasty scratch beneath his right eye. There was a red dot on his chin where the beak had punctured the skin.

Every time Ed slammed the cock to the floor of the garage, the white bird seemed to bounce back more enraged, trying for his face, his eyes.

"Well, damn you then, you white devil!" Ed shouted. He seized the cock by its long neck, and talons scratched viciously at his wrist. With a twist and a practiced snap, the rooster's neck had been wrung.

"What happened to it?" Smitty wanted to know.

Ed shook his head, held the dead bird by its legs. "Musta been the heat. That's a lot of money down the toilet," he said, dangling the limp rooster before her eyes.

A strange squawk came from Killer's cage. Ed and Smitty turned in alarm. The big black rooster's eyes had gone dead in that same peculiar glaze.

"Oh, God, no!" Ed gasped, rushing for the cock's cage. "Not Killer! Smitty, get me some water in that pan over there. I gotta dunk him. This goddamned heat!"

Ed flipped open the cage's door, reached for his prize cock. "Come on, baby, I'll save you!"

It seemed to be a demon's wail that came from the parted beak of the black rooster as it flew for Ed's face. Gooch got his hands up to block the attack, but he felt piercing pain in the palms of his hands.

My God! The slashers on Killer's legs. He hadn't bothered to remove the three-inch razors.

The next rush of feathered fury opened two eight-inch wounds in his chest.

"Killer!" Ed shouted in a protest that became a sobbing cry. "Killer, stop!"

The slashers opened flesh beneath his left bicep.

"I can help you, baby!" Ed promised. "Don't make me kill you!"

Smitty was screaming again, cursing whatever whim of fate had brought her into such madness. Why had she risked Leroy's displeasure for a chance at the money roll of a half-crazy cockfighter and his murdering birds?

With a leap of remarkable prowess, Killer opened Ed's forehead. Blood oozed over his pain-widened eyes.

Smitty headed for the still-open garage door. She wouldn't have turned around for even a last look at the insanity behind her if her curiosity had not been aroused by a bizarre gurgling noise.

For years to come she would wish that she had not obeyed that impulse to identify the sound; for she would not soon forget the sight of Ed Gooch staggering to the floor, blood spurting from his slashed jugular vein like water spraying from a sliced garden hose.

Wovoka told us to have nothing to do with evil spirits.

I have no choice, caught as I am between the Land of the Spirits and life on the Earth Mother. I am helpless to do anything other than to accompany the Thing that is Everything and No Thing wherever it takes me. I cannot be freed from it until the Navajo healer returns and releases it from his command to protect me and my possessions.

This I have learned of the Chindi: it can move but by night; it can act but through a living creature.

It enters a living thing, as it did the bearded one's roosters, and takes their spirit from them. When it has finished using the living thing's body, the spirit returns and the Chindi takes its leave.

I am glad that it has reclaimed the head of the skeleton; but I am sorry that the bearded one had to die because of the skull I once lived in, for it is less than nothing to me now.

Neither do I care for the Sharps rifle or the Navajo pots. I have even lost feeling for my Medicine bag.

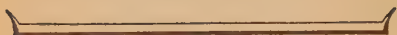
It is a thing of sorrow that I cannot make the Chindi understand that I no longer care for these ele-

ments of Earth Mother life. The Chindi need not reclaim them on my account.

But the Chindi has no will of its own. It exists because the Navajo healer chanted it so and sang it into being. At least that is my understanding.

And it is also my understanding that others will die, as did the bearded one, because they have disturbed my burial place and have taken those possessions for which I no longer care. I care only to leave this in-between place and journey to the land of the Spirits and to be with all the grandfathers and grandmothers.

Eleven



Professor Carl Fredericks pulled back the canvas and scowled in momentary confusion. "Mr. Jacobs, I thought you said the skull had been taken away."

Barry's mouth made a small "o" of surprise. "Why, it had, Professor Fredericks. It was knocked off with the point of a shovel and taken away."

"Well, there it is."

There was no arguing that point. As Barry leaned over the skeletal remains of the nameless Indian, the empty eye sockets of a skull returned his astonished stare.

Fredericks stood up, pulling his shoulders back as if they were stiff, and made a slight grimace. A well-rounded potbelly swelled the western-style shirt that was tucked in at the beltline. The black leather strings of a bolo tie draped themselves over his chest from the silver image of a Hopi kachina doll.

"Maybe the ghoul who took the skull had a change of heart in the middle of the night," Fredericks speculated. An erratic muscle tension at the corner of his mouth made him appear always on the verge of an impish smile.

Barry considered the thought. "The men did fight

over the skull," Barry said. "I mean, whether or not he should take the skull. The leader . . ."

"Cal Hawkins," Fredericks supplied.

Barry paused and studied the professor's face for some emotional clue to his relationship to the illegal pothunter.

"I know it was Cal who called me and tipped me off about the skeletal remains," Fredericks answered Barry's unspoken question. "He suggested I call you and make an early morning appointment with you to see the skeleton. He was being considerate of your having to go to work."

Barry waited for Fredericks to continue, but the professor had clamped his hands at his sides and appeared to be massaging his lower back with his thumbs. "Think I sprained something last night. I worked late unloading some new artifacts."

Barry nodded. "So anyway, as I was saying, Cal Hawkins made a big point about how all skeletal remains must stay undisturbed at the burial site and that you should be notified. A fellow named . . ."

Again he hesitated, not fully comprehending the legality of the situation. If he identified any of the men, the professor might have them arrested, and Barry would end up having to testify in court. He could imagine what a fellow like Gooch or Ramon—who would probably be arriving any minute to work on the pool—might do to anyone who squealed on them.

"Mr. Jacobs," Fredericks began, removing his sunglasses from a shirt pocket and working them over his ears and down over his rather bulbous nose, "the burial mound was found on your property. Your backyard is not sacred Medicine territory, and it is apparent that no dig of any consequence will ever be made here."

The professor stretched his neck and scratched at his Adam's apple. "I would like to see ninety-nine percent of all the pothunters staked out on the desert

sands. But there are a few of them, like Cal Hawkins, who are really knowledgeable bastards and who are really in love with the Old West. Cal also has a begrudging respect for the kind of work I do in attempting to preserve the historical truth of a dig and of each individual artifact. But we are diametrically opposed in our philosophies of how an artifact should be handled. Cal sees a pot as money in the bank. I see a pot as a specimen in a museum."

"Well, the fellow who took the skull would probably be the kind of pothunter you would like to stake out on the desert," Barry went on.

"No doubt," Fredericks agreed.

"There was a fight, and Cal told the man who wanted the skull to take it, but never to work with them again," Barry finally got it all out.

Fredericks looked up at the nine o'clock sun, already nearly ninety degrees, and squinted behind his dark glasses. "It could be that this bozo got to thinking it over. Cal and his partner, Carlos Dominguez, are two of the most knowledgeable amateur historians and archaeologists in the state of Arizona. Some years they might make over a hundred thousand dollars apiece by peddling pots. The men who work with Cal and Carlos have got to be more fortunate than the vast majority of pothunters. The skull-napper just might have decided to bring the skull back last night to keep on the good side of Cal."

"Could be," Barry conceded. "There is no question that the skull is now back where it should be."

Fredericks nodded. "You know, Mr. Jacobs, there is something rather unique about this skeleton."

"Yeah, Cal Hawkins mentioned something about a Ghost religion among the Indians and that this was a member of a tribe not from the area."

Fredericks laughed. "Yes, that bastard does know his stuff. Too bad he could never have sat in one spot long enough to have earned a degree so that he could do his digging legally."

The professor shifted his weight and knelt again beside the remains. "This man is wearing a Sioux Ghost Dance shirt, but the beadwork is Paiute. The Ghost Dance religion started among the Paiute Indians and was led by an Indian Messiah named Wovoka. Wovoka was probably influenced by Mormonism and combined a lot of Christian elements with traditional Indian Medicine beliefs. It is a fascinating drama in American history."

"And, as I understood Cal Hawkins, it is a bit of a mystery why and how this Paiute got here in Arizona," Barry remarked.

"And I doubt if I will be able to solve it," Fredericks said, puffing rather noisily as he got to his feet. "But I will have fun speculating about it."

"It seems that there is a faraway bell ringing somewhere in the back of my head, but I'll have to sit quietly and smoke my pipe to find out if it's ringing because I know something—or if it is only the bats in my belfry bumping the bell!"

Fredericks laughed at his little self-deprecating joke, then told Barry that he would load the skeleton in his station wagon and remove it from the Jacobses' backyard.

"That will make my wife very happy," Barry chuckled. "She must have got up a dozen times last night to check to see if the mummy was walking toward our house."

It was hard to imagine Carol, so efficient, so businesslike, so no-nonsense, squeamish about a skeleton in the backyard. Barry had teased her about it—actually secretly delighting in having found a weakness in Little Miss Hard Nose—until she had become really angry about his joking.

Professor Fredericks was about to leave before Barry remembered his promise to Don Red Fox. "Professor, I nearly forgot something very important," he began.

Fredericks had one leg behind the wheel, and he

stopped to raise a shaggy, questioning eyebrow as he was caught in an awkward, half-sitting position.

"I promised an Indian named Don Red Fox that he could have the remains for sacred burial after you finished studying them."

Fredericks sat heavily back against the cushions of the front seat, one leg still on the cement of the Jacobses' driveway. "Who the hell is he?"

"He's an Indian from Iowa. A Mess-something-or-other. And he says that he is going around to museums and places requesting the return of all Indian skeletons for sacred burial."

Fredericks did not seem pleased. "I've heard of him. He's either a troublemaker or just a pain in the ass. I won't know until I've met him. Whether I respect his religious wishes or not will depend on how valuable I decide this skeleton is to my research."

"But I did promise him, Professor," Barry repeated.

"Let me worry about Mr. Red Fox," Fredericks scowled. "There are so few Indians qualified to know what to do about preserving their history. And until there are more of them, white eyes like me know better what to do to make a meaningful record of the red man on this continent."

Fredericks pulled his leg behind the wheel and slammed the door. With a brief smile and a cursory wave the professor was gone with the skeleton.

Carol was calling to him from the backyard. He pushed open the wooden gate set in the concrete block wall and found his wife on the patio. She was holding the morning edition of *The Arizona Republic* open on the picnic table.

"Well, your mummy has just left you," Barry told her. "You can sleep in peace tonight."

Carol did not respond. Her attention was secured by something in the morning paper. She folded a section lengthwise and handed it to Barry. "Where have I seen that man before, honey?"

She had been looking at a picture of Ed Gooch.

"Freak Accident Claims Life of Gamecock Fighter," the small headline announced. For some reason Barry felt his pulse and his respiration rates increase.

"He was one of the men who was here last night," he heard himself telling Carol. "He was the man who . . . took the skull."

Carol poured Barry a cup of coffee. "It says that he was killed by one of his own roosters. Did you know that cockfighters put three-inch razors on their birds' legs? They call them 'slashers.'"

Slashed Gooch's jugular vein, the newspaper story told Barry as his eyes skimmed the story. For some undetermined reason he seemed unable to focus his full attention on the printed page he held in a hand that was suddenly unsteady.

"Carol," he told her, "the skull was back with the rest of the skeleton."

Carol paused in mid-sip at the rim of her coffee cup. "How can that be?"

"When Professor Fredericks pulled back the tarp, the skull was there."

"If you're kidding me, so help me . . ."

"I'm *not* kidding you." There was something in the tone of Barry's voice that convinced Carol that he was not jesting. "Professor Fredericks thought that maybe Gooch changed his mind and brought the skull back so that he might stay in good with Cal Hawkins."

"Did he know Gooch had been killed?"

"I don't know. I never mentioned him by name. I just referred to him as 'the man who took the skull.'"

"The newspaper says that he was killed about two o'clock," Carol said. "Some girl was with him when the roosters attacked him."

"He could have brought the skull back before two," Barry said, adding some creamer to his coffee.

"But wouldn't we have heard him?" Carol asked. "I mean, we didn't go to bed until after midnight. And I

was up several times during the night. Wouldn't I have seen him?"

"Do you want to believe the skeleton went after its own head?"

Carol shuddered. "No, goddamn it, I do not!"

Barry leaned back in the metal lawn chair and sipped at the hot coffee. "What a hell of a bizarre coincidence. A man steals a skull from a grave, and just about has his own head cut off that very night."

"The newspapers say that his jugular vein was slashed and that he bled to death," Carol said, insisting upon the proper cause of death.

" 'Deep slashes,' it says," Barry read aloud the crucial two words. "Slash the throat deep enough, and what happens? The head is severed from the body."

Carol set down her cup. "Talk about gory subjects often enough, and what happens? I throw up on the table!"

"I'm sorry," Barry apologized. "But this really blows my mind."

He ran a forefinger over the picture of Ed Gooch, tracing the outline of his bearded face. "It's the kind of coincidence that would make less sophisticated people believe in curses or something."

Carol responded with some comment, but it was lost in the noise of the laborers arriving for another day of manual work around the pool. Ramon Quintana led the way through the wooden gate, the other four men trailing in his wake. As soon as Ramon spotted them having coffee on the patio, he grinned and gave them an exaggerated wave.

Then Barry felt his stomach lurch. The one called Luis looked as though someone had used his face as a punching bag. Luis had been the one Ramon had blamed for having notified Don Red Fox of the skeletal remains in their backyard.

Barry found himself getting to his feet, approaching Ramon. "What happened to Luis?" he asked Quintana.

Ramon laughed. "Hey, Luis, the man wants to know what happened to your face? What was it, huh? A revolving door?"

Luis said nothing in reply. He turned his back to Barry and Quintana, put his foot on the edge of his shovel, and pushed the blade into the sandy soil around the pool edge.

"Don't worry, Mr. Jacobs," Ramon said smugly, swelling his broad chest. "I found out that Luis was responsible for our trouble here last night with the Indian."

Ramon slammed a balled fist into his thick palm. "Divine Justice took place," he told Barry with a cruel smile.

Barry's voice was cold. "You want to hear about Divine Justice?" he asked Ramon, holding the folded newspaper before his eyes. "Just read what happened to your friend Ed Gooch."

Ramon's eyes narrowed as he saw that it truly was Gooch's picture. "I . . . I don't read English so good. What . . . what happened to Ed?"

"Nearly had his head cut off last night, Ramon. Isn't that something? An eye for an eye. A head for a head." Barry felt a kind of primitive pleasure when Ramon's mouth dropped open and his lower lip began to quiver.

"How did such a thing happen?"

"The slashers on the legs of his own gamecock slashed open his jugular vein. A freak accident, the newspaper calls it. Gooch bled to death. The girl who was with him said the roosters just seemed to go berserk and to attack Gooch. And those slashers just slashed his throat. How's that for divine justice, eh, Ramon?"

Barry was beginning to feel a pang of conscience for his mental cruelty to Ramon. Quintana's eyes were flicking nervously from Barry's face to the open hole from which the skeleton had been removed.

Barry realized that he had touched a superstitious

nerve in the man's psychic makeup. He was about to relent when he glanced at Luis's battered face. In the further interest of Divine Justice Barry decided to give Ramon another couple turns of the screw.

"The skull was back here this morning, Ramon."

"What you mean, back here?" Sweat was running in small rivulets over Ramon's forehead and from his thick sideburns.

"Professor Fredericks and I found the skull right where it should be this morning," Barry clarified his statement. "How do you suppose it got there?"

"I dunno. How?"

"Do you suppose Gooch had a change of heart and brought it back here before he was killed?"

"Not that money-hungry bastard."

"Then, how, Ramon, did the skull get back here?"

"How?"

"I don't know, Ramon," Barry told him. "I have no idea. Maybe there's a curse on that grave."

"What you mean, curse?" Ramon's eyes were wide. He was shifting his weight steadily from side to side. He seemed almost to be disco dancing in place.

"Well, maybe Gooch wasn't killed by his rooster at all," Barry leaned forward, affecting a conspiratorial whisper.

"Maybe that skeleton came and slit Gooch's throat to get his head back. Maybe that skeleton will come to each of you who took things from its grave and get each one of you. Maybe tonight, Ramon, when you are walking somewhere after dark. . . ."

Ramon threw his shovel to the ground. He brought both fists up, as if he were going to smash them into Barry's chest.

Then, thinking better of such a move, Ramon dropped his arms noisily to his sides. "I quit this job!" he shouted at Barry.

"I've got some more cold beer today, Ramon," Barry smiled.

Ramon shook an angry forefinger at him. "You're a

mean sonuvabitch, Gringo Jacobs. I quit!"

Without another word the husky Chicano stomped to the gate and slammed it loudly behind him. In a few moments Barry heard Ramon's pickup roaring away from its parking place in front of their house.

Carol was standing before him, her eyes wide in disbelief. "You are a mean 'sonuvabitch,' Barry. How are we going to get this pool completed with you scaring off the help?"

"Don't worry, ma'am," Luis spoke up for the first time. "I will do the work of two. Ramon mostly leans on his shovel, anyway. I promise you that you will miss Ramon no more than *we* will!"

The other three men laughed and nodded their agreement with what had transpired at the beginning of their working day on the Jacobses' pool.

Carol shook her head with a strangely satisfied smile of reappraisal on her lips.

"Okay, Mr. Jacobs," she conceded. "It appears you have won the loyalty of the remaining crew members. But if I read in tomorrow morning's *Republic* about a 'freak accident' involving Ramon, I'm holding you directly responsible."

Twelve



It was Barry's telephone that day from ten until twelve o'clock. There was so much competition among real-estate agents in the valley that in order to keep peace among their own personnel the Homes-2001 office appointed certain hours to give each agent a chance for sales.

Barry folded the green sports coat over his arm and checked his wristwatch. It was ten eighteen. The business with the skeleton, Professor Fredericks, and then the set-to with Ramon had put him behind schedule. Thankfully he had already set up a twelve-thirty appointment to show a house to a doctor who was moving to the valley to establish private practice. Doctors nearly always represented hefty commissions because of their income brackets, and Barry had selected a number of houses in the one hundred thousand and up price range.

Barry shrugged his arms into the coat as he stood before the modern glass front of the Homes-2001 building on Scottsdale Road and Stetson. He always wore the obligatory green blazer inside the air-conditioned office, but he doubted if he would ever become acclimatized to wearing a coat in temperatures over one hundred degrees. He had soon learned why so

many businesses in the valley were alive by seven or eight in the morning. The searing heat had the merchants awake at dawn so that they might fold their tents by four, when the thermometers often read 105 degrees.

Bob Chambers was excitedly pitching the virtues of a property in the McCormick Ranch area to an elderly couple, who, Barry made a mental wager with himself, probably belonged to the Pontiac with the Illinois plates he had seen parked out front. Chambers had the slick mannerisms of a prosperous snake-oil salesman and the voice of a carnival barker. Barry had not warmed toward the man at all.

Pete Dolan brushed by as Barry entered the office. "Good morning, Barry," Pete grinned, hoisting his notebook of listings, "I've got a hot prospect."

"Good luck," Barry matched his smile. "Maybe you'll be able to afford your summer home in the mountains."

"Or meet this month's mortgage payment on the house I've got," Pete laughed over his shoulder as he left the building.

Rhonda, their group secretary, had already prepared a pot of fresh, hot coffee. A slim, well-dressed black girl in her early twenties, Rhonda seemed to have majored in efficiency in business college. She served as receptionist for Homes-2001 on Tuesdays and Thursdays, taking telephone messages for everyone. Then on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays she typed forms and letters for Bob Chambers, Pete Dolan, Debbie Edwards, Consuelo Martinez, and himself.

Barry glanced at the wire basket atop the filing cabinet next to his desk. There were a number of new listings with accompanying photographs to review. He had plenty of time before Dr. Buckland would be arriving, so he intended to use it by looking up the addresses of the houses and locating them on a map of the Phoenix area. There was nothing more

embarrassing than getting lost while showing a client a house. Even though he might explain that he himself was a newcomer to the city, clients always seemed to assume that if you couldn't find the right street, you really couldn't know much about selling houses.

As he flipped through the photos of the new listings, Barry began to fantasize about selling a two-hundred-thousand-dollar home to Dr. Buckland. God! Wouldn't that set them up great? After the move, the purchase of the new home and the pool, their bank account was anemic. In fact, he groaned inwardly, glancing at the calendar, he was two weeks late on September's support payment. He had a fleeting, but powerful, image of Elizabeth's scowling face registering extreme impatience.

Then, in some bizarre bit of mental association, Elizabeth's accusatory frown was replaced by Ramon's angry, yet strangely fearful, eyes. Barry smiled wryly as he recalled the brutish man's apprehension and confusion at the suggestion of a curse which might be visited upon the violators of the Indian mound. He had really done a number on Ramon.

Well, Barry justified his somewhat cruel action, Ramon had deserved a good scare. Judging by Luis's bruised face, Ramon was a man who delivered what he considered instant retribution. There was a certain rightness about a man who operated on such a primitive level of reward and punishment receiving a strong jolt of atavistic fear. Besides, could he help it if Ramon were superstitious?

Barry thought again of Luis's battered face. Then he reviewed the memory of Don Red Fox being punched around by Ed Gooch. Why had he interfered? Why had he taken a chance with his own personal well-being by sending Gooch sprawling to the ground? If the others had not stopped it, he could have found himself slugging it out with the husky, violent man. How would he have fared? Could he have

handled Gooch, or would Gooch have pounded him into a bloody pulp? Why had he taken such a chance?

And why had he goaded Ramon so on behalf of Luis? He knew how explosive the Chicano's temper was. Ramon had lifted his fists as if he were about to start swinging. Good God! Why was he living so dangerously? He did nurture a general concern for truth, justice, and the American way, but he sure as hell was not Superman. He was no man of steel to be such a champion of the underdog. Why would he risk getting himself clobbered for two Indians who really meant nothing to him?

Maybe he had overdosed on Sunday school when he was a kid. "There is a great brotherhood of man," the minister had intoned. "All men are brothers."

He was doing it again. Barry was making another strange mental association. He was standing beside his mother and his father and his two younger sisters, and they were all looking up at the gigantic stone faces of Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson, and Teddy Roosevelt that had been blasted out of Mount Rushmore. He was thirteen. It was the summer of 1958, and the Jacobs family was vacationing in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

That night, while everyone watched television in the motel, Barry had asked permission to walk downtown to see if he could find some authentic cowboys on the streets of Rapid City. He was told that it would be all right if he was back no later than nine o'clock and if he was very careful.

Barry had not walked far when he spotted two men in cowboy hats getting out of a battered, rust-flecked jeep. They wore faded jeans, pointed-toe boots, and their faces were sunbrowned and windburned. They certainly appeared to be the genuine item, and they seemed in a big hurry to walk into the brick building with the gaudy, flashing neon lights.

Barry hurried up the sidewalk until he stood beside the jeep. The squat building was, according to the

neon sign, the Sioux Chief Saloon. Barry's eyes had widened. The sign actually said that this place was a saloon. Images from a dozen western movies flickered through his adolescent brain. This had to be a place where real cowboys hung out.

Then Barry spotted something that struck him as absurdly paradoxical. Beneath the proud proclamation in neon that the building was the "Sioux Chief" saloon was a crudely lettered sign that warned: "No Indians allowed!"

Ever since he had been a very small boy, Barry had been struck by the vast number of remarkable paradoxes and incongruities in life. Such as the father with a cigar in his mouth whipping with a belt the son he had caught smoking. Such as the man with the swelling potbelly chiding his slender wife about her having put on weight. Such as the girls who wore the skimpiest bikinis to the pool shouting at you and threatening to call the lifeguard if you stopped to look at them. Such as a bar that called itself the Sioux Chief Saloon prohibiting the patronage of Indians.

He had been about to laugh at his private joke when the scarred wooden doors slammed open, and a young man was roughly pushed into the street. Barry was astonished to see that the man, probably in his mid-twenties, was an Indian. Either by accident or by deliberate challenge, he had tested the threat of the warning sign.

Now the young man, most likely a Sioux from the nearby Pine Ridge reservation, stood encircled by half a dozen angry, shouting men who insisted that he should be taught a lesson. The Sioux remained calm, almost impassive. He wore a beaded amulet about his neck, but otherwise he was dressed in the identical attire as the cowboys who surrounded him—faded Levi's jeans, boots, a blue work shirt, and a Stetson.

One of the men—a bullnecked, thick-shouldered, foul-mouthed redhead—rushed the Sioux. The Indian

sidestepped the charge as gracefully as a toreador evading *el toro*. Before the heavier man could regain his balance, the Sioux had delivered two quick punches to the side of his head and his ear.

A tall cowboy decided to try his luck. The Sioux's fist met the man's advancing momentum, doubled the impact, and dropped the cowboy to his knees.

The other four cowboys backed away, formed a tight ring of mutual cowardice. It no longer seemed like such a good idea to teach the rebel Sioux a lesson. They would be content merely to cheer on the two bolder members of their instructional committee.

As soon as the bullnecked man got to his feet to charge the Sioux, the young man knocked him down again. The tall cowboy managed to get in a couple of hard punches when the Indian was facing the other man's rush, but once Bullneck was taken care of, the tall one was quickly dispatched by the Sioux's sure-firing fists.

Barry was upset that it was two against one, but he was thrilled to see the young Indian taking care of himself so well.

But then an older man appeared, pushed himself through the ring of cowboys surrounding the fight, and struck the Indian from behind with a tire iron.

The man with the iron spat contemptuously on the sidewalk as the Sioux reeled from the foul blow. "Now, goddamn it, finish the sonuvabitch!"

The young Indian had clamped both hands to his head in an involuntary effort to staunch the pain. He grimaced in agony, doubled over, but kept moving his legs in short steps in order to stay on his feet.

Bullneck angrily wiped blood from his split lip, then took advantage of the Sioux's dazed condition. He waded in and slammed four blows in rapid succession to the young man's midsection. The cowboys ringing the scene began to cheer wildly, shouting encouragement to their champion.

The tall cowboy didn't want to lose out on the ac-

tion. He managed to land a roundhouse right to the Indian's jaw before the Sioux sprawled to the sidewalk.

Barry was horrified by the disgusting act of foul play. How could the two men even feel that they had won when they knew the Sioux had been struck from behind?

But Bullneck and Tall Cowboy were not finished. They were not interested in winning the fight but in taking revenge on the Sioux for having humiliated them in front of their friends. Bullneck hoisted the Indian to his feet and pinned his arms behind him, then Tall Cowboy started in on the Sioux's face and stomach with one vicious blow after another.

Barry saw a policeman loitering against the wall of a nearby building. He ran to the man and shouted up at him: "Officer, those men are fighting with that Indian. Stop them quick!"

The policeman finished lighting a cigarette before he responded. "Where do you see a fight, boy?"

Barry pointed naïvely to the circle of men. The sickening sound of the blows could be heard clearly.

"That's no fight," the officer laughed, sending ashes from the cigarette spilling down his shirtfront. "That clumsy Indian boy tripped, and those nice men are brushing the dust off his clothes. Them Sioux are dirty people, and those good ole boys are just helping that one stay clean."

That was when Barry realized that the policeman had been there all the time, leaning against the building, watching the whole thing. Barry's knees began to shake, and he didn't feel his feet. He was getting sick.

The man who had struck the Indian from behind with the tire iron was talking to the police officer. "Thanks for the use of the iron, Hud. I put it back under your front seat."

"Well, thank you for helping me with riot control, Jenks," the officer grinned. "I couldn't really leave

the side of this building, you know. The wall might cave in if I stopped leaning on it."

Barry's mouth dropped in shock as he heard the policeman's admitted complicity in the filthy deed. Some nameless, ghastly compulsion pulled his eyes back to the scene of the beating.

Bullneck and Tall Cowboy had finished their terrible business. The young Sioux lay very still. Blood ran freely from his nose and his mouth. He didn't make any sound at all whenever one of the cowboys who had been cheering on Bullneck and Tall Cowboy would suddenly become bold and land a kick on his stomach or back.

Barry wished that he could have suddenly become a giant and charged the men. He would have punished them for the awful thing that they had done to the courageous young Indian. And, yes, he would have given the irresponsible policeman a thumping, too. And the man who had wielded the tire iron. And anyone else who challenged him.

But he was thirteen, five feet six inches tall, one hundred and twenty-six pounds. And he felt even smaller. And completely helpless. And very sick.

When he got back to the motel, there was vomit all over his shirt. He had been unable to give his parents a full account of what he had witnessed until they were two full days away from Rapid City.

"Hey, Barry, having a little trouble getting acclimated to the heat?"

Barry blinked himself out of the terrible memory, out of the reverie, up to the future. His boss, Bill Hargitay, was standing in front of his desk, leaning forward on his knuckles, smiling down at him. Bill was darkly tanned, always perfectly dressed, always professionally friendly to his employees as well as his clients.

"Good morning, Bill," Barry said. "I guess I was

lost in thought. Trying to focus on a winning sale with Dr. Buckland."

Bill winked his approval. "You been listening to those tapes I gave you?"

Barry lied with a nod of his head. Every real-estate agency had stacks of success-oriented cassette-tape programs that promised each salesperson a million-dollar year if he or she would think positively. The tapes all seemed to have a dozen beginnings so that one could turn them on anywhere and hear the confident voice of a professional speaker assuring the listener: "That's right. Today is your day. Your chance to win the biggest sale you've ever dreamed of!" The tapes were like taking "uppers" through the ears.

"Those tapes really inspire a guy, right?" Bill asked for confirmation in a suddenly soft, solemn voice.

Barry shifted uneasily in his chair. "I owe a lot to them," he said, pleased with himself for coming up with an answer that was bound to satisfy the boss.

Bill made an "okay" with bent thumb and fingers, smiled expansively, and walked into his elegantly furnished private office.

Barry settled back into his chair and resumed his study of the city map and the new addresses. Maybe this would be his day. Maybe he could sell Dr. Buckland a condominium.

Dr. Morris Buckland arrived precisely at twelve thirty. Barry was always in awe of such punctuality. He could never comprehend how someone could arrive at exactly the prearranged time without a preparatory period of rehearsal and timing with a stopwatch. He wondered if Buckland hadn't been hiding around the corner of the building, eyes focused on his watch, so that he could enter exactly on time.

The two men shook hands, and Barry noted that Buckland's hand was stronger, rougher than one would normally expect from a member of the medical profession. In fact the man looked more like a brick-

layer than a doctor. He was solidly built, an inch or so below six feet tall, and appeared to be in his early forties. He wore a sport shirt with a hole at one elbow and blue jeans with paint speckles on the left leg.

The doctor proved to be a frank-speaking man. "I hope you weren't expecting a wealthy medico to get you a new Cadillac with your commission, Jacobs," he warned.

Barry shrugged and took a moment to study Buckland's rugged features before he answered. The man had a number of small scratches and nicks on his chin and neck, as though he had shaved off a heavy beard within the last few days. His eyes were a very bright blue and appeared bemused with whatever they beheld.

"Whatever you want to see, Dr. Buckland, I'll be happy to show you," Barry replied cheerily. Inside, though, several budding expectations were stricken with terminal disappointment.

As if sensing Barry's inner sense of loss, the doctor seemed compelled to offer future hope. "Once I've established myself, and my wife and kids rejoin me, I'll want a bigger place. If you do a good job for me now, I'll remember you then."

Barry nodded, picked up his notebook of listings, indicated that the doctor should follow him. "My car is right out front, Dr. Buckland. We'll find the right house for you."

Buckland touched Barry lightly on the arm as they left the building. "Please call me Morris," he requested. "I'm a very informal guy. Don't call me Morey, though," he added with a grin. "I'm not that informal."

Barry unlocked the car door for the doctor, chuckling at the man's gesture of friendliness. "All right, Morris, why don't you tell me the price range of house that you're looking for."

Buckland shrugged and made a slight grimace. "I

really can't go much higher than sixty thou until I get established in private practice. I should tell you that I've been working with the Indian Health Service near Rough Rock, right in the center of the Navajo reservation. I've been there four years, and it has been mostly for love, rather than money."

"I see," Barry said as he opened the door on the driver's side and got behind the wheel.

"I mean, not that there is any reason why you should care, but ever since I was a kid back in Bowie, Texas, I've felt the red man has got a real shitty deal from Anglo society," Buckland said after he had fastened the seat belt across his trim midsection. "I loved working on the reservation, but my wife separated from me about a year ago, took the kids with her, said that it was splitsville unless I came 'back to civilization,' in her words."

Barry moved the Oldsmobile out into the heavy traffic flow of Scottsdale Road and headed north toward Camelback. "Where is your wife now?"

"She took the kids back East to her folks in Vermont," Buckland said, his voice becoming wistful. "She just couldn't relate to life on an Indian reservation. She really got ticked off when I started working with the Medicine men and started helping them to teach young Navajos to become healers."

Barry stopped for the light at the intersection of Camelback and Scottsdale roads. "That does seem a bit unusual for a doctor," Barry suggested. "You must be a very openminded individual. Wouldn't most doctors feel that you were slipping into superstition, rather than helping the Navajos?"

Buckland shrugged again, fashioned another facial grimace. "I'm a pragmatist, Barry. I'm for whatever helps the person who is ill. The treatment for any illness—especially those of a mental nature—must meet the cultural expectations of the patient. And those old Medicine men simply had a handle on some things they never taught us in medical school."

"You mean," Barry wanted to understand, "that there really is something to what those Medicine men do?"

Buckland leaned forward to adjust the air-conditioning vents so that a more direct flow would move over him. "Yes, Jacobs, there is," he answered. "I don't know exactly what it is that they do—some sand painting, some chanting, a little dancing, a lot of talk—but they do somehow produce healings that often border on the miraculous."

Barry crossed Chapparal, still heading north on Scottsdale Road. "I think there'll be some houses for you on Cholla," he said, recentering the conversation on the true purpose for their excursion.

"Remember, Jacobs, I can't afford a new house."

Barry was quick to reassure the doctor. "These are four to six years old, but they've all been really well maintained." Barry adjusted his sunglasses with the tip of a forefinger. The high-noon sun was incredibly bright. "So Medicine men really do get the job done, eh?" Barry picked up the conversational thread.

"Yes, they do," Buckland nodded, moving slender hands with long fingers up to brush the dried scratches on his face. It was as if the doctor cherished the memory of a full beard. "No conventional medical doctor who has actually worked with them would ever put them down. They're damned effective at what they do."

"And that's more than reading the entrails of animals and predicting when the first snow will come," Barry chuckled. "Is that what you're saying?"

Buckland did not seem terribly amused, but he was tolerant of Barry's attempt at humor. "I worked with Navajo healers," the doctor clarified. "Reading guts and bones and stones and seeing the future is something a shaman does."

"Navajo practitioners generally fall into three categories," Buckland went on. "There are the herbalists, who know about medicinal plants. There are the

shamanistic diagnosticians, who employ such techniques as hand trembling, crystal gazing, or star gazing. They seek to determine the cause of the illness, so that the third group of healers, the singers, can do the truly curative work. The singers are the highest status group among the Navajo healers."

Barry reached into the pocket of his green sports coat for a pack of chewing gum. "Interesting," he commented in regard to the doctor's impromptu lecture. One element which the success tapes continually reemphasized was to get the customer talking about himself. "It's certainly apparent that you were doing exciting work there on the reservation."

Buckland grunted softly and accepted a proffered stick of gum. "I pretty much did what I would do in any medical clinic. I gave shots, stitched cuts, prescribed pills."

"You didn't work together with the Medicine men and heal people?" Barry questioned, slowing to permit a cowboy in a pickup truck to move around him.

"Oh, God, no," Buckland laughed as his jaws worked at the chewing gum. "Navajo metapsychology almost completely eludes me. I just respect what they do. They're really into dream interpretation, for example. I used to love discussing dream symbology with them. But I'm just not hung up on forcing everything that happens in life into neat scientific principles. I know what I can do with penicillin and a sharp needle, and I'm proud of my medical knowledge and how it can help people. But I also know what those Medicine men can do with a song, and they're proud of knowledge which we might call supernatural."

Barry had been momentarily distracted by the heavy traffic at the Shea Boulevard and Scottsdale Road intersection. Now that they were about to turn off on Cholla, he tried mentally to catch up with the doctor's comments: "So you believe, then, that some

of those Medicine men actually have supernatural powers?"

Buckland leaned back against the cushions of the Oldsmobile. He chewed the gum reflectively for a moment or two before he answered. "Jacobs, the Navajo Medicine men simply do not make the same kinds of distinctions among different levels of reality as the non-Indian people do. They reject as stupid and destructive any attempt made by an Anglo to translate what they do into ordinary language and situations. Once a one-hundred-year-old Medicine man said to me that I knew the world of books. They knew a part of the mind that my book knowledge had not discovered. It is that part that is unknown to the Anglo that they believe is most important in determining whether a person will remain well or become ill."

Barry checked the first address that he had written on a sheet of notebook paper and pinned to the sun visor. "But hasn't modern psychiatry found all those 'hidden areas in the mind?'" Barry asked the doctor.

Buckland's hands once again came up to brush the memory of his beard. "From a strict scientific point of view the mythology of the mind is a rather flimsy construct. We have created an elaborate, dynamic model of the mind that doesn't coincide with any neuroanatomical or physiological reality that we know. There may be many 'hidden' areas in the human psyche. And there may be many levels of reality in what we feel is our fully explored physical world."

Barry slowed the car to check a house number. They were only two blocks away from the first house on the list. "More things between heaven and earth than are dreamed of by our science and philosophy—or words to that effect, as Hamlet said to 'Dear Horatio.' Is that what you're saying?" Barry asked.

Buckland smiled. "Yes, I think Shakespeare continually advised us to accept the reality of more than one world of existence."

Barry stopped in front of a brick home with desert landscaping. Both husband and wife were at work, but Barry had the key and standing orders to show the house any afternoon from one to four.

"Is this the first one?" Buckland asked, carefully scrutinizing the home. "Doesn't look too bad."

"It's a lovely home," Barry said, slipping into his patter. "Well maintained. The woman is an immaculate housekeeper. The husband is being transferred to California, and they're heartbroken about having to leave the place."

Buckland opened the car door. "Well, let's check it out."

As Barry was opening the door on his side, he unexplainably had a flickering memory of Ramon's angry face, of the Indian mound beside their pool, of the skeleton's head returned to the disinterred bones. "Hey, Morris, do the Navajo Medicine men ever put curses on anybody?"

Buckland waited for Barry to get out of the car and join him on the front sidewalk before he answered. "The only thing like that that I have heard of is the *Chindi*. It's a kind of spirit that a Medicine man might chant or sing into existence to guard someone or something or to uphold his dignity and reputation."

"Could a Medicine man set a *Chindi* to watch over a grave?" Barry had to ask.

"Sure," Buckland replied. "That's the kind of thing that *Chindis* do best, seeing that people pay proper respect to final resting places and anything that belongs to the Earth Mother."

Barry felt a peculiar throbbing sensation in his stomach. His thoughts seemed to lock in on the mound in their backyard, the pot hunters uncovering skeletal remains and old Indian pots.

But Buckland was saying something more: "There is a very remarkable case in the literature that you may be interested in reading. It has to do with a Na-

vajo family that had a *Chindi* sung on them by a Medicine man whom they had cheated. According to the records, the curse was lain on the Long Salt family in 1825. After several of their number had died horribly, they set about placating the offended Medicine man. He was touched by their pleas, and he agreed to call off the *Chindi*. Unfortunately he died before he could do so."

Barry felt a bit foolish, but gooseflesh had puckered the skin of his arms. "And you're saying that the *Chindi* could live on even after the Medicine man had died?"

Buckland shrugged and made another of his grimaces. "The *Chindi* is a nonphysical thing, a spirit. All I'm telling you is what the literature records. Because the Medicine man died before he could call off the *Chindi*, a once-powerful family of over one hundred members was reduced to only ten members by the year 1900. Men and women who married into the family died in the same awful and mysterious ways as the Long Salts. Medical doctors were helpless to cure the wretched manner in which the Long Salts literally wasted and rotted away."

"It sounds like voodoo," Barry said.

"I guess it does in a way," Buckland agreed. "And it all may well have been some kind of perpetually induced psychological trauma that killed the Long Salts. But as a matter of record the last member of the family died in 1928, even though she was being guarded by the Behegade family, who had resolved to protect her from the *Chindi*."

Barry opened his mouth to ask another question, but Buckland raised open palms at chest level. "Jacobs," the doctor smiled, frowning his brow in a silent plea, "will you please try to sell me a house? I'm trying to get *off* the reservation, remember?"

Thirteen



Merry Henderson carefully spread her toes and gently edged the second little piggy and the third little piggy up her sleeping husband's nostrils.

Sam gasped and snorted, sat up shaking his head violently from side to side, like a dog with a chicken feather up its nose. He blinked his eyes against the sun of high noon streaming through the windows of the bedroom in their mobile home. When he saw his laughing wife stretched out across the foot of the bed, he roared his outrage.

"Damn it all, Merry! I warned you about waking me up that way!"

"I . . . know . . . I know," Merry nodded her head. She was laughing so hard that the straps of her nightie had slipped off her shoulders. "You nearly smothered when you was a kid in your crib, and my toes bring back them awful memories."

"Yes, gawddamn it! You're a damn sadist, that's what you are."

Merry started to reply in her defense, but the sight of her angry husband's screwed-up face made her burst out again in laughter.

"Jeez," Sam said through clenched teeth. He rolled

his eyes ceilingward in his best simulation of haughty contempt.

"Well," Merry grinned, "every Thursday when you have a day off from climbing them poles for the county you sleep until noon."

"So," Sam shrugged his broad and bony shoulders. "It's your day off from slinging hash at Hobo Joe's. You can sleep until noon, too."

"That's the point, you yo-yo," she scowled, hitching her knees under her chin. "I want to get up and go and do something."

Sam smiled, reached a long arm toward her neck, and squeezed his fingers at the nape. "Hell, we don't even need to get out of bed to *do* something!"

Merry tried to shake her neck free of Sam's powerful fingers. "C'mon, Sam, knock it off!"

Sam began reeling his arm back to his chest, dragging Merry toward him. "I'd love to knock something off," he snickered at his adolescent play on words.

"You do too damn much of that!" Merry protested, managing to get her neck free. "I don't want to spend my day off sitting all cooped up in this tin can!"

Sam winced. He had been living in the mobile home at the Aztec Travel Trailer Resort before they got married. He had promised Merry a house within a year of their nuptials. Three summers had passed, and he knew his wife was getting impatient. That was how he had talked her into pot hunting with him. He had told her how much extra money they could make.

"Okay," he frowned. "You gonna start bitching again? After a bit we can go over to Beano's. But you got to promise me that you won't ride the bull."

Merry raised a well-plucked brown eyebrow. "You still jealous that I can outride you?"

"It just ain't fittin' for a female to ride bulls."

"Sam Henderson, you are a big male-chauvinist hog!"

Enterprising Beano Mulligan had installed a mechanical practice bull in his honky-tonk. Riders on

the rodeo circuit used the machine to keep in shape during the off-season. If a cowboy was able to stay on the bull's back for eight seconds, he had held on long enough to qualify in a rodeo.

"Dutch always works the control harder when a man gets on," Sam complained.

Merry laughed and made a playful grab for Sam's crotch. Sam instinctively crossed his leg to protect his genitals.

"That's the real reason a woman can ride that bull longer than 'most any man,'" Merry grinned devilishly. "That bull's back pounds away at a man's balls like it's trying to make an enoch outa him."

"That's 'eunuch,'" Sam corrected her. But he knew Merry was right whether she pronounced the word properly or not. The majority of men were thrown toward the mattresses with battered testicles.

"I'm wearing my new jeans that I sewed the flowers and sequins on," Merry announced. "And maybe my new knit top."

"Why don't you wear a dress, honey?" Sam suggested.

Merry saw through the ploy. "Ha! Ha! Sam Henderson," she scolded him, wagging a forefinger as if she were a schoolteacher catching a young rascal putting a frog in the desk drawer. "You just think that if I wear a dress, I won't dare get on that bull. Let me tell you, Sammy baby, if I take a mind to ride that bull, I will do it—dress or jeans, don't matter which."

"You wear a dress on that bull and show your ass off to the cowboys hanging around Beano's, and I'll break your neck," Sam threatened.

Merry seemed pleased by Sam's jealousy. She snuggled up against his chest, twined her forefingers in the sparse patch of hair between his nipples. "Don't you want the other guys to see what you're getting?" she whispered.

Sam grabbed a handful of soft buttocks. "That

sight is for my eyes alone," he said, a proprietary growl rumbling deep in his throat.

He rolled over on top of Merry, his big hands stroking the length of her torso, making her breath come in short, little gasps. She spread her legs to permit him access, and he felt smug that he was getting his way.

"If I'm gonna smash my balls tonight," he said just before he kissed her, "I better get some afternoon delight right now."

From the outside Beano's looked like an abandoned warehouse on North Scottsdale Road. Except for the garish neon sign challenging the hot Arizona darkness, there seemed nothing to distinguish the place from any other roughhewn, flat-roofed clapboard building stranded on the desert by a business gone busted. But when Beano's clientele pushed open the batwing swinging doors, they entered another world that was part Old West honky-tonk and New West Pinball Wizard.

Beano's had fifteen pool tables, forty-six pinball machines, a dance floor with a shit-kicking live band, a dining room that served the best rare steaks in Phoenix—and the mechanical, piston-driven rodeo bull. On some Saturday nights, especially when a touring country singer was going to be there, more than three thousand people packed themselves into Beano's.

Before he had left their mobile home, Sam had put on the clean bell-bottomed blue jeans that Merry had just ironed. He had pulled on his pointy-toed cowboy boots and given their black leather a real spit polish. Although he knew a real cowboy shirt should have long sleeves, Sam had to acknowledge the hot September night that was steadily maintaining ninety-six degrees; so he put on his blue short-sleeved shirt with the mother-of-pearl snaps.

Merry wore her flower- and sequined-trimmed blue

jeans with a yellow knit top. Her boots were decorated with dozens of little white stars. She decided it was too hot to wear the black felt flat-brimmed Stetson that matched her husband's. Sam, she knew, would wear his cowboy hat to hell's half acre.

Carefully wrapped in an old Indian blanket and stowed in the trunk of their veteran '72 Chevrolet station wagon were the pots that they had looted from the sparse mound on the Jacobses lot. Sam and Merry often sold their artifacts at Beano's. There was almost always a good crowd for pots, beads, arrowheads, and any old weapons.

"Hey, lookee see who's sitting at that table back yonder," Sam grinned boyishly as he spotted Cal Hawkins, Kathy Miller, Carlos Dominguez, and his wife, Elena. "Gawd, I was hoping Cal would be here tonight."

Merry's expression turned sour as if the gum she was chewing had been suddenly transformed into some vile substance.

"You and that Cal," she said, her voice edging on disgust. "You hero-worship that man to a point of embarrassment."

"Not so," Sam said, impatient with his wife's lack of enthusiasm. "I just admire him. He's a real man and smart as hell."

Merry knew that the real reason she hated joining the table was Kathy Miller. Merry had wanted to shine tonight. She knew she looked good—all snug in the new blue jeans. She had worked for two hours on her hair. The knit top showed off her breasts.

But now it would all be for nothing. Next to Kathy Merry felt as though her ass looked like she had stuffed two Sears catalogs in her back pockets. Her hair looked like spaghetti. Her breasts looked like two seedless grapes.

"I wonder why Kathy isn't working tonight?" Merry asked. But it was more a curse than a question.

Kathy worked as a cocktail waitress at the Registry Resort, a swank new hotel on Scottsdale Road.

"She must have a night off, too," Sam said, taking Merry's elbow and steering her through the crowd toward Cal's table. "Maybe Beano will let her sing tonight."

Kathy also said that she was working as a cocktail waitress only until she got her break to become a country singer. Cal was good friends with Beano, and Beano sometimes let Kathy sing with the band. If she sang tonight, Merry promised the imp on her left shoulder, she would pretend to have an epileptic seizure right in the middle of Kathy's number.

Cal looked up from his beer to see Sam and Merry coming toward their table. He raised an eyebrow in greeting, managed a one-sided smile.

Carlos followed his friend's gaze, waved at the young couple, and smiled expansively.

"Please," Carlos said, rising to his feet, "join us. We have not yet ordered our steaks."

Kathy winked. "How you two honeymooners doin' tonight?"

She always called them honeymooners. Merry cringed. Someday their kids would be going to college, and Kathy would still be calling them honeymooners.

"Jes' fine as a cow in clover," Sam smiled. He minded his manners and swept off his black Stetson. "How you doin' tonight, Miz Dominguez?"

Elena Dominguez smiled and nodded her head in an aristocratic, regal manner. She was a beautiful, dark-haired portrait of Old World Spanish elegance. She appeared in her very early forties, probably ten years younger than her courtly husband. Elena Dominguez seldom spoke, but she was always gracious in her manner.

Sam was always inspired by Cal and Carlos.

Cal seemed the very prototype of the "man of the

West," totally self-reliant, brave, soft-spoken, wise in the ways of the world.

Carlos carried himself as if he were a Spanish don. Although he was not much more talkative than Cal, Carlos always seemed to know exactly what to say, precisely how to conduct himself.

Sam sometimes had a fantasy that his two older friends had really been together in the Arizona territory for over a hundred years and that they would live forever as representatives of the best of their peoples.

"Ah, Merry," Carlos was saying, "you look so lovely tonight. Sam is such a lucky man."

Carlos helped Merry be seated, then turned to prod a gentle elbow into Sam's ribs. "I hope you realize what a fortunate young man you are to have so attractive a wife."

"Sure do, Carlos," Sam grinned, giving Merry's hand an affectionate squeeze. Then he worked his chair and his long legs under the round table.

"I love what you've done to your hair, Merry," Kathy said.

Merry's eyes widened at the compliment from the flashy blonde with the painstakingly wrought coiffure. "Thank you, Kathy," she smiled tentatively.

"Yeah," Kathy nodded. "It looks so much better than the weird way you used to wear it. When you got that kind of dead, mousey hair, you know, you gotta work with it."

Merry wished she had a pie to throw in Kathy's face. A cow pie, preferably.

A roar came up from the fenced-off area around the mechanical bull.

"Some poor bastard just got his nuts busted," Sam chuckled, shaking his head in remembered pain.

"You gonna ride the bull tonight, Merry?" Cal asked.

"No way," Sam blurted. "She promised me no more bull riding."

Cal laughed. "C'mon, Sam. This is the age of women's lib. You ain't afraid of a little competition, are you?"

"Depends how many beers I have," Merry managed to answer for herself.

Sam glowered at her, trying his best to intimidate.

"You read 'bout what happened to Gooch?" Cal wondered.

Sam frowned and shook his head. "He get picked up for drunken driving again?"

"He'll never be *that* fortunate again," Carlos said. "One of his own fighting cocks slashed Gooch's throat with those razors that they stick on rooster's legs."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Sam gasped.

"More than likely you will," Cal smiled. "But Ed Gooch has beat you to it."

The waitress came to take their orders. It was rare steaks, home fries, tossed salads, and Coors all around, except for Elena Dominguez, who ordered two cheese enchiladas and wine. Sam and Merry remembered then that Elena was a vegetarian, a preference which always seemed remote, even bizarre, to their way of thinking.

They had just started on their salads when Cal asked Sam if he knew what was wrong with the blue shirt with the mother-of-pearl snaps that he was wearing.

"Yes, Cal, I do," Sam nodded slowly. "It should have long sleeves."

Cal smiled, seemingly pleased with the response.

Merry had noticed before she had married Sam that her husband had a strange kind of student-teacher relationship with the older man. Whereas Sam usually had a pretty short fuse when it came to anyone criticizing him, he seemed to welcome any attention at all from Cal Hawkins.

"That's right, Sam," Cal continued. "If a cowboy in the Old West wore short sleeves, his arms would get

scratched off by the first mesquite tree he passed. The same thing is pretty much true today, of course."

"It's so damned hot," Sam offered in brief defense.

"There's air conditioning in here," Cal countered, unappeased. "You even got air conditioning in that old heap you drive."

Cal lifted his own sleeve for emphasis, letting the light reflect from the three mother-of-pearl buttons at the wrist.

Cal set down his fork, looked around the dining room at the remarkable variety of people feeding themselves at the forty tables scattered about the high-ceilinged eating space in Beano's Arizona Shangri-La.

"Sam, you just take one minute to study these folks and tell me something unusual about the way they are dressed."

Sam worked the mouthful of lettuce to one side, moved his head slowly, as if it were a periscope, from side to side.

"I don't see anything unusual about the way anybody is dressed," he said after a couple of minutes.

Cal smiled. "You wouldn't, 'cause you're dressed in that same unusual way. So am I. So is Kathy. So is Merry."

Sam shook his head. Cal had lost him.

"Sam," Cal chided. "Look at Carlos and Elena. They're dressed in suit and tie and formal evening clothes. They're dressed like Americans should be dressed in 1980. We're dressed in cowboy clothes. Like we live back in 1880."

"But we *do* live in Arizona, Cal," Sam protested his friend's point.

"Ah, yes," Cal chuckled. "And we are *all* cowboys. Right?"

Sam shifted uneasily and swallowed the mouthful of lettuce that had lain forgotten during his study of the men and women in the dining room.

"Are you a cowboy, Sam?" Cal persisted. "Do you

ride the range for a living? And look at Bill over there. Or Bud over there. Bill works in a bank, for Gawd's sake. Bud drives an ice-cream truck. Hell, there are probably no more than six real cowboys in the place tonight."

Cal paused and took a deep swallow of his Coors. He wiped foam off his lips with the back of his hand. "Do you know why we are all sitting here dressed like cowboys?"

Sam shook his head. He loved it when Cal got philosophical.

"It's because we live in such a screwed-up, confusing, mixed-up world, that's why," Cal answered his own question. "Things are just getting too complicated for the average guy. Society isn't black or white anymore. It's mostly gray. Right and wrong have blended into one. You can't tell the good guys from the bad guys, even *with* a program!"

Carlos aimed a stream of smoke from his cigar at the light fixture hanging from the ceiling. "What you are saying, my friend, is very true. Very true, indeed."

"As this great land of ours becomes more and more confusing," Cal continued his impromptu dissertation, "as the average man becomes more unsettled in his mind, he begins to yearn for simpler values. Hell, he *needs* to have values to straighten out his head and his life. Simple values for decent living have never been expressed better than they were in the code of the Old West."

Sam felt like he should take his hat off or something, but the Stetson already hung on the back of his chair.

"You know what those values and virtues were, don't you, Sam?" Cal asked him, his cold blue eyes boring into him, the scar beneath his left eye like a streak of lightning against the tan of his cheek.

Sam had had this lesson many times from his master teacher, and he was pleased that he could respond without hesitation.

"In those days," he began, just as he had heard Cal say the words so often, "a man was independent, totally self-reliant. He was brave and he kept his body clean and strong. He was direct, open, and honest in his dealings with his fellow man. He never picked on anyone weaker than he was, but he knocked hell out of any bully. He revered all decent ladies, pitied all those women who had fallen prey to foul men, and never abused either woman."

Cal nodded his head in deep satisfaction. "That was good, boy. Real good."

Sam's heart thudded his chest in pride. His own internal pleasure gave him such a mental rush that he missed Cal's next question. "Beg pardon, Cal?"

"I asked if you had ever seen Joel McCrea and Randy Scott in *Ride the High Country*?" Cal repeated.

"I don't believe I have," Sam said after a few seconds' search of his memory.

"Then you keep checking the TV listings until you find that movie on some late show some night, and don't you dare miss it," Cal prescribed earnestly.

"Old Joel McCrea really lives the code in that movie. He's got holes in his boots, frayed shirt-sleeves—long sleeves, by the way, Sam—and he's a broke old lawman. But there's nothing can tempt him into dishonesty. Randy Scott plays his old sidekick, who yields to temptation for a bit, but he comes back into the code before one hell of a shoot-out. That is one hell of a movie, boy."

"I won't miss it," Sam promised, leaning back in his chair to permit the waitress to set the heated tray with the steaming, rare steak before him. "It sounds real good."

Fourteen



Sam felt really fine when he and Merry climbed into the station wagon to drive home. The six of them had sat around the big round table drinking beers. Cal and Carlos had talked about the Old West and the way things were when life was so much less complicated than it is today.

Sam had danced with Merry, and he had even enjoyed doing the polka with her. And Merry kept her promise and didn't ride the bull, in spite of the fact that one of the waitresses at Beano's took a turn and got a lot of attention, which Sam knew made Merry jealous.

If Merry and he could have found a customer for their pots, the night would have been completely perfect. But who was to complain? They wouldn't have any trouble getting rid of them.

"Sam?" Merry hummed, her head resting against his shoulder, her right hand gently kneading his inner thigh.

"Yeah, babe."

"Do you remember that old road in the desert where we used to park?"

"I sure do, honey." Sam looked up at the moon. A

little nostalgic romancing would compensate for their failure to sell the pots.

He leaned forward and turned on the radio.

"Mmm, yeah," Merry agreed. "Get some nice dreamy music on the radio. I love country for drinkin' and dancin', but I want something with a lot of violins when we're lovin'."

"Wish we could afford a tape deck," Sam said as he moved the dial from number to number.

"That would be nice," Merry yawned, nodding her head against his shoulder.

"There's the Commodores," Sam told her. "They're singin' 'Three Times a Lady.' I like that one. I think I'm gonna make you three times a lady tonight."

"Oh, Gawd," Merry giggled. "You shoulda rode that bull and busted a nut so you would take it a little easy on me."

Sam turned north on Scottsdale Road. Their old parking place was on a lonely desert road just south of Carefree. It was a thirty-five-minute drive out there from where they were, then another hour back to their mobile home, but hell, it was only a little past midnight.

And if Merry was as truly inspired as she seemed, it would be like old times, making mad, passionate love in the back of the old Chevy station wagon.

As they passed Rawhide, the 1880 tourist town, the Commodores had given the microphone to the Bee Gees and their lament of "Tragedy."

Merry seemed to have dozed off. Driving with his right hand, Sam reached under his elbow and slid Merry's knit top down over her breasts.

She grunted, made a sleepy effort to pull the top up to a respectable level, but her left nipple still showed above the hem of the blouse.

"Hey, lookee down there," Sam nudged Merry as they drove past the Pinnacle Peak development.

"Right down that road is where the Jacobses live."

He pointed a finger against the window. "Bet that light way down yonder is theirs."

Merry yawned, her mouth as wide as a baby bird expecting a worm.

"We got to try to sell them pots tomorrow," she said as the memory of the dig in the Jacobses' backyard was stirred by her husband's monologue.

Sam rolled down his window, flicked his cigarette butt out into the night, then glanced up to the rear-view mirror so he could watch the tiny shower of sparks splash over the pavement. Cal Hawkins had once told him that bomber pilots in World War II could see someone on the ground light a cigarette in the darkness as they flew over a city.

"Sure was terrible about Ed Gooch, wasn't it?" Sam asked.

Merry shuddered. "Don't talk about ugly things when we're gonna drive out to the desert."

"Carlos said Ed's head was nearly sawed right off by that damn old Killer Crowbeak," Sam went on, having his say.

Merry screwed up her face, curled out her tongue, and made a noise like she was clearing her throat.

"Some folks would say that the bastard got what he deserved, fightin' gamecocks and all," Sam observed. "But I say that even though Ed was a stupid, mean, ugly sonuvabitch, he didn't deserve to die such a horrible death."

"Amen," Merry intoned and placed her palms together as if in prayer. "Now let's drop the subject."

"Funny how it happened right after he took the old Indian's head, ain't it?" Sam mused, a little part of him hoping he sounded like Cal Hawkins being philosophical. "It's like there is some ancient law: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a head for a head."

Merry had reached in her purse for her cigarettes, but before she pushed the dashboard lighter, she in-

voked another ancient law: "Sam, too much talkie, no nookie."

Sam laughed, punched in the lighter for his wife. "Sorry, babe," he offered. "I was just feelin' kinda philosophical about old Ed's cashing in that way."

Before the lighter coils had reddened enough to ignite Merry's cigarette, the Chevy wagon was bouncing down the desert road.

"Now don't go so damn far, Sam," Merry warned him. "I used to worry that if we ever had car trouble out here, we'd be dehydrated to cinders before we could walk back to the main road."

Sam knew Merry's fears were not unfounded. No one walked very far when that sun came roaring up from the eastern horizon and fanned the temperature up to 109 degrees. He had learned long ago never to drive into the desert without containers of water in the car. The plastic milk bottles riding back there with the pots were a little stale. He'd have to change them in the morning.

Sam pulled into an abandoned lane. "How's this, babe?"

"Fine," she said. "Now let's get to it before we wear the battery down listening to music."

"Jeez!" Sam laughed. "You got a stopwatch on me? How much time am I allowed?"

Merry pulled off her knit top. "Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to come out here. I mean, maybe we should have just gone home. We *are* married, you know. We don't have to screw in back seats anymore."

"You that worried about being in the desert?" Sam wondered.

Merry shrugged. "I dunno. Something just started seeming weird when we were driving out here."

Sam cursed himself. Merry had been all heated up until he started babbling about Ed Gooch. Most guys always blamed the woman, but Cal had told him long ago that when a man didn't get a good piece of tail,

it was almost always the man's own damn fault because he'd rushed it or because he had been crude or vulgar.

They opened the front doors and blinked as the overhead light came on. They got out quickly, slammed the doors, opened the back doors, and moved onto the air mattress that Sam kept spread over the rear of the wagon.

Sam admired the topless beauty of his wife in the moonlight. "You sure are pretty, Merry."

She pecked at his lips. "As pretty as Kathy Miller?"

Merry was fishing. A forced comparison between Kathy and Merry came up often during their love-making.

Sam was wise enough to know that the woman who's about to let you screw her had better be told that she is the most beautiful woman who ever drew breath.

But he hated to lie. He knew that Merry was about a "seven" on a scale of ten and that Kathy Miller was off the chart. He had devised an answer that seemed to satisfy Merry's requirements of vanity and his own requirements of honesty.

"Kathy's not my type," he said, encircling Merry with both arms, drawing her to him. "She's kinda standoffish, kinda snooty, and wears her clothes too flashy. I like a woman who's warm, open, down to earth. A gal who can be your friend as well as your lover."

Merry moved her lips over his, and Sam felt her moist tongue moving inside his mouth. He began to unzip her jeans.

But Merry pulled away, her eyes wide in the moonlight. "Did you hear it?"

"Hear what?" Sam was annoyed that he felt prickles of fear at the back of his neck.

"I heard something like a flute," Merry said, turning her head to look out of the window behind her.

"A flute?"

"Like the kind the Navajos play during their ceremonial dances."

"Who the hell would be playing a flute out here?"

"Sam," Merry's voice was a harsh whisper. "I feel like someone is watching us."

Both of them jumped at the sound of a strange, yelping gurgle somewhere out in the desert.

Sam had lowered the rear window for ventilation just before he parked the car. The front windows were also down. He was oddly aware that a Fleetwood Mac song was playing on the radio.

There was another peculiar yelp.

"Hell," Sam laughed, relieved. "It's a damn coyote."

Merry was not pacified by his analysis of the sound.

"There is something moving toward this car," she told him. "I can hear it walking. And it is walking on two feet!"

Sam decided he'd better get back to the front seat so he could roll up the back window. The window button was just to the right of the ignition, and it worked only when the key was on. Since the key was turned to "accessory" to permit the radio to play, he had only to move the window button downward to secure the station wagon's rear quarters.

"I'm coming up there with you," Merry said as her husband's long legs slithered past her over the front seat.

Sam felt atavistic fear shudder his body at the sound of a screaming howl at the rear of their car.

It was a piercing wail that seemed part animal, part human, and part some unnamed nether creature. The screeching moan blended with Merry's scream and with his own startled shout.

Somehow he managed to scoop the flashlight with the magnetic clasp from the dashboard. With one movement he snapped on its switch and directed its beam toward the rear window.

A coyote was standing there, its forelegs hanging over the window. Its muzzle was curled back to reveal

long, yellow canine teeth. And that hideous, snarling, howling scream was coming from deep within its throat.

Even as the animal pulled itself into the station wagon, Sam noticed a minute, but strangely significant, detail: the coyote's eyes did not reflect light. It was as if they were dead.

The enraged coyote caught Merry by the back of the neck just as she was diving over the front seat.

Both his wife and the snarling, snapping animal fell on Sam, and the flashlight was knocked from his hand to land on the top of the dashboard.

Sam tore at the coyote with both of his hands. He cried out in pain as incredibly powerful teeth pierced flesh between thumb and forefinger.

A victim of his own reflexes, Sam released his hold on the animal's fur. But then he screamed his rage. The coyote was ripping at Merry's naked breasts as it began moving for her throat.

Sam grabbed the coyote, pulled it off his wife. He yanked it next to his chest and crooked his elbow around its throat. He would squeeze the life from its body.

The coyote tried working its jaw under the vise of flesh so that it could chew its way out of the trap. Although the coyote was good sized, it still did not weigh more than forty pounds. Amazement at its remarkable strength penetrated Sam's fear and desperation.

Sam cried out when the teeth first bit into the flesh of his forearm, but he resolved that he would not release the animal even though it might rip out his sinews one by one. He would increase the pressure of his elbow clamp until the coyote was dead. He would not let it loose to tear at Merry's throat again.

The coyote bent and twisted its body. It was trying to get the claws of its hind legs to scratch at the arm that held it so tightly.

It was when the first pain of those claws slashed at

Sam that he remembered the tire iron he kept under the front seat as a security measure.

The fingers of his left hand frantically sought the metallic supplement to flesh and bone. Desperately they closed around the smooth handle of the iron tool. He would have to release his hold on the snarling creature in order to deal with it most effectively.

As he dropped the coyote, it squirmed and wriggled to regain an adequate position for attack.

Sam was faster. His long legs shot out and pinned the animal to the floorboard.

His laughter was almost maniacal. "Go ahead, you sonuvabitch! Bite all you want. You can't get through those boots!"

The first blow from the tire iron was deflected by a corner of the dashboard.

The second blow smashed the coyote's skull.

The third splattered brains, blood, and hair over the fire wall.

It wasn't until he had contemptuously kicked the dead coyote out of the car that he became aware of Merry's whimpering.

Some time during the struggle she had been able to make her way into the backseat. She was curled into a fetal position on the air mattress. Sam reclaimed the flashlight from the dashboard and saw by its beam that his wife was bleeding from the back of her neck, her shoulders, and her breasts.

There was no need bringing the dead coyote in for analysis. There was no doubt in Sam's mind that the animal had been rabid. Its unprovoked attack. Its hideous, maddened howling and snarling, almost like a human scream. He had never heard anything like it.

He and Merry were in for quite a hospital stay, no doubt about it. They had both been severely bitten by a rabid coyote.

"Don't worry, babe," he told Merry, although he suspected that she could not hear him through her

shock and her pain. "I'll have us in the emergency room of Scottsdale Memorial Hospital in three shakes."

Sam laughed grimly as he became aware that the Bee Gees were singing about "stayin' alive." That was exactly what he was going to do: stay alive! He clicked off the radio and began to reach for the ignition switch.

But there was music all around him. A flute, just like Merry had said. And he heard a drum. A rattle, too. Like a Navajo ceremonial dance. He wanted to reach for the ignition key, but somehow he couldn't.

There were three shapes moving toward the front of the car. The music was growing louder, but Sam shook his head and pulled out the switch for the headlights.

Three coyotes were approaching the station wagon. They were walking on their hind legs. Their muzzles had bared long, yellow canine teeth. The music had been replaced by terrible screaming snarls.

As Sam's hand reached for the tire iron, he saw that none of their eyes reflected the light from the headlamps. It was as if they were all dead things.

Tears stung Sam's eyes. Merry was moaning in pain.

"I'll do the best I can, babe," he said.

He knew that she couldn't hear him, but he had to say it anyway.

Cal Hawkins had once told him that every man needed a fitting epitaph. Sam figured that was as good a one for him as any: "Here lies Sam Henderson. He did the best he could."

Fifteen

The young man died bravely.

Before the Sioux went into battle, they used to say: "It is a good day to die."

There was no need for the young man and his woman to have died. I cared nothing for those pots. I miss those old bones far more than I miss the Navajo pots. It is strange not having those old, dried bones with me in my hollowed-out place in the Earth Mother, but they served me far better when they carried my flesh, so I really care not for them any longer.

I hated the white men so much. That was why I carried my vision of Wovoka's dance to the Sioux. I wanted the Sioux to drive the white men into the ocean. I wanted the Ghost Shirts to make the Sioux invincible. I wanted the soldier's bullets to melt like snowflakes against a warm horse's body when they struck the Ghost Shirts.

But now I hate no one. I feel nothing. I want only peace. I want only to pass to the Land of the Grandfathers.

I do not know if the Chindi hates. But the Chindi

kills. And unless the Navajo healer who summoned the Thing returns to stop it, it will kill all those who have shown disrespect to my resting place and to the Earth Mother.

Sixteen



Cal Hawkins's pointed-toe boot touched the belly of one of the three pots that Barry Jacobs had found on top of the old Indian mound that morning.

"They was right here?" Cal asked, his eyes narrowed and fixed on the pots as if they were objects of remarkable mystery. "I mean, you didn't move them or anything?"

Barry shook his head. "The manual laborers finished yesterday, and the contractors finally poured the cement for our pool. I came out this morning to start hosing down the sides of the pool the way they told me, and I noticed the pots over here where the burial mound had been."

"Well, they are the three that Sam and Merry Henderson took," Cal said, pulling the brim of his hat low against the bright desert sun. He hated to wear sunglasses unless he was driving.

"Here are the first two," he told Barry, tapping one pot, then a second with the pointed toe. "And here's the third, which I gave them after the hassle with Gooch."

Barry glanced up at the sun. It was about noon. The temperature would surely hit 104 again before

three o'clock. He wondered if he should ask Cal in for a beer.

"Why would Sam and Merry bring the pots back here?" Barry asked.

"Beats me," Cal admitted. "They surely did not mention such a maneuver last night at Beano's."

"Maybe their consciences got to bothering them just like Ed Gooch's must have," Barry chuckled.

Cal's face remained impassive, but his eyebrows knit slightly in puzzlement. "What do you mean?"

"Gooch brought the skull back during the night, probably just before he was killed," Barry said. "Your friend, Professor Fredericks, had a complete skeleton to study."

Cal tugged at his tight, black gloves in a nervous gesture. Barry could not imagine how the man could wear leather gloves in such heat.

"You're not kidding me?" Cal wanted to know.

Barry laughed. "No, Cal. I guess in the code of the West, as they say, there's a little bit of good in the worst of men."

Cal frowned and reached into a shirt pocket for a cigarette. "Maybe, but the most good Gooch ever did was in dying young."

Barry was surprised to see Cal place a "factory made" on his lips. He had expected Cal to roll his own cigarettes from a Bull Durham sack.

"I really got your friend Ramon going about the skull," Barry admitted, watching the tall man cautiously. "I think I got him convinced that there was a curse on the Indian mound and that the skeleton had gone after its skull and got it back at Gooch's ultimate expense."

Barry laughed alone at the recollection of his joke on Ramon. He cleared his throat and felt strangely uncomfortable at Cal's poker face. It seemed difficult to believe that the pothunter might have a superstitious streak.

"I don't suppose you saw either Sam or Merry drop

these pots off?" Cal asked, exhaling twin streams of smoke through his nostrils.

"No," Barry shrugged. "Neither my wife nor I saw them. Of course, I didn't know who had done it. That's why I called you to see if you knew what is going on. I mean, first you people are fighting over the pots and the skull, then you start sneaking back at night to replace things."

"Did either of you see Gooch fetch back the skull?" Cal continued the interrogation.

Barry shook his head. "Why do you suppose they're bringing back the pots and . . . things? I don't want the damn things."

Cal took two deep drags of his cigarette before he answered. "Sam's kinda been like a son to me. Last night we ran into him and Merry at Beano's. Outa some kinda funny habit I picked up, I called their place last night to see if they got home all right. There wasn't any answer."

"They're young, Cal," Barry pointed out. "Maybe they went some other place before they went home."

Cal nodded. "Sure could have. But there was no answer this morning, neither. And I called early, before either of them woulda left for work."

Barry was puzzled. "What are you suggesting, Cal?"

Cal shook his head. "Wish to hell I knew."

"Well, that's why I called you," Barry reminded him. "I wanted to know what the game was, dumping these Indian relics back in our yard at night. I mean, it is trespassing, for one thing."

Cal seemed not to hear him again for a long moment. "You seen that Red Fox around your place again?"

"Of course not," Barry scowled. "Why should he come around here? You people took the pots—in which he claimed to have no interest. And Fredericks took the skeleton—in which he had enormous interest."

Cal pursed his lips and sent cigarette ashes scatter-

ing down the front of his cowboy shirt. "Just let me know if you see him around your place again."

Barry sighed. "Well, I suppose I will see him one day. I promised him that I would do everything that I could to see that Fredericks turned the skeleton over to him after his study of it was completed."

Cal squeezed the tip of the cigarette between gloved fingers, flipped the dead butt into a mound of dirt at the side of the newly poured pool. "I just hope that Indian hasn't started some night studying of his own."

"Do you think Red Fox had anything to do with the return of the skull and the pots?" Barry wanted to know.

"He was one crazy Indian," Cal said. "You never know what a crazy Indian might do."

"You can't believe that he would have stolen the skull and the pots and dumped them back here," Barry protested. "If what you seem to be suggesting were true, he would have taken the skeleton to match the skull and run. He wouldn't have brought the skull back to the mound where he knew Fredericks would get the remains."

"You just can't figure Indians the way you can white men," Cal said coolly.

"Do you theorize that Red Fox stole the skull before or after Gooch was killed?" Barry pressed him.

Cal ran a forefinger along the scar below his left eye. "It's pretty hard to believe that damn rooster killed Gooch. Maybe the bird had a little help."

Barry sighed his frustration with the man. It had certainly been determined that Cal was not superstitious. But he was a very paranoid amateur detective. "Cal, there was a witness who saw Gooch being attacked by first one rooster, then the other. His throat got slashed by the razors he himself had placed on his bird's legs."

"Could be Gooch was just wounded by the birds," Cal argued. "The gal took off running and didn't

come back until later with the law. Red Fox could have come along, found Gooch laying there gouged up, and finished the job."

Barry frowned, shaking his head to emphasize his rejection of the entire hypothesis. "But why would he return the skull to the mound? Why not come back here to steal the skeleton to join the skull for sacred burial?"

Cal tugged at his gloves. "Like I said, there's no figuring a crazy Indian." He turned, began walking toward the gate, and Barry assumed the conversation had been terminated.

Just before he reached for the gate latch, Cal turned and raised a forefinger.

"Barry," he said. "Number *one*, you call me if any more pots or things show up back on the mound."

A second finger went up. "Number *two*, you sure as hell call me pronto if you see that Indian hanging around here!"

Seventeen

"Can you believe that Cal Hawkins thinks Don Red Fox is bringing the pots back to the mound in our yard?" Barry Jacobs asked his wife.

Carol was seated on the edge of their bed, combing Bobby's hair. The boy was home from school, and they had promised him an outing at the zoo. That was a nice thing about being a real-estate agent. Barry could always slip away for a couple of hours. Besides, it seemed a sure thing that Dr. Buckland was going to make a bid on one of the houses that he had shown him, and that called for some kind of celebration.

"Oh, was that who just left, Cal Hawkins?" Carol was concentrating on arranging her son's hair. Bobby was wincing as though the comb were a heinous device of torture.

"Yeah," Barry nodded, sitting in the chair before Carol's cosmetic mirror. "He thinks that Red Fox stole the skull and brought that back here, too."

Carol turned to frown at Barry. "Why doesn't Cal think that Red Fox would just keep the skull, since he wanted the skeleton so badly?"

"That's what I asked him. But he just kept saying that Red Fox was a crazy Indian."

Carol shrugged. "Maybe he's right. Maybe Red Fox is a crazy Indian. He certainly didn't seem all that rational to me."

"Cal also suspects Red Fox of having killed Ed Gooch. Do you think he seems that crazy?"

Carol patted Bobby's bottom, finished with her maternal grooming. "Indians used to take scalps," she said.

"I like Mr. Red Fox," Bobby spoke up. "I think he is brave. I hate that man who hit him. He is a real creep."

"He's a creep no more, Bobby," Barry told him. "One of his own roosters killed him."

Bobby stared wide-eyed into a space before him, lost in an eleven-year-old's fantasy of a rooster slaying a grown man.

"Did the rooster peck him to death?" he asked at last, expressing the only theory that made any sense to him.

"No, Bobby," Barry explained. "Ed Gooch was one of those men who make roosters fight each other. Those kind of men put razors on their roosters' legs so that they can cut and slash the other men's roosters. Gooch's rooster jumped at him and slit his throat with the razors on its legs."

Carol's green eyes flashed disgust. "Don't tell Bobby such things."

"Aw, Mom," Bobby groaned, "that's reality."

Carol looked accusingly at her husband. "And where did you learn that word, my man?"

Bobby cringed. He had not wanted to betray the confidential talks that he had been having with Barry about life and the world and how men and women sometimes behaved. He liked having the grown-up talks with Barry. Most of all he liked having Barry pay special attention to him.

"Heard it on television," Bobby answered.

Barry smiled. He had not been betrayed. A firmer

bond of affection was growing between him and the boy.

"Anyway," Barry moved in, seizing the opening before Carol pursued the matter of "reality" in front of Bobby, "Hawkins told me that the pots we found this morning are the three that Sam and Merry Henderson took. He also told me that Sam and Merry are missing."

"How could he tell those were the same pots?" Carol questioned.

"He's an expert," Barry said simply. "He could probably pick them out of a truckload of similar pots."

"When we leavin' for the zoo?" Bobby asked. He was more concerned with the truly important aspect of the day.

"Right now," Barry reconfirmed his pledge. "Get your hat on."

Bobby emitted a cowboy's "*whoopee*" and ran for his own room and the black cowboy hat with the neck string.

"God, you're making a cowboy out of him," Carol complained.

"I'm not making anything out of him," Barry replied. "We're in Arizona, and he's taking to the environment. Don't worry. I doubt if the desire to ride the range and brand cattle will last much beyond his graduation from college."

Carol pushed him out of her chair before the cosmetic mirror.

"You look fine," he said, glancing at his wristwatch. He did want to get some work in at the office. Carol had to do her face even if they were only going to run to the supermarket to pick up a quart of milk.

"I won't be long," she told him. "I've got to put on this special lotion to protect my skin against that ungodly sun out there."

"You should let yourself tan more," he said. "I love beautiful blondes with dark tans."

"How are you on beautiful blondes with red sunburns?"

Barry watched Carol smoothing the cream into her cheeks. The shoulder-length straw-blond hair framed a face that had always been pretty. It would be hard for Carol to grow old. Already she had begun the battle against aging with the determination of a general who had vowed to fight to the last man.

"Sun makes wrinkles," she told him as she dabbed an extra amount of the lotion over the laugh lines which were beginning to form at the corners of her eyes. "The sun is not a lady's best friend. You know a light-complexioned woman must be extra careful in the sun."

Carol's maiden name had been Lundquist. Her blondness and her fairness came from untold generations of Swedes.

"I love the sun," Barry said for no apparent reason, then felt incredibly stupid for uttering what would probably be taken as an argumentative statement.

"But men don't have to worry about wrinkles and aging in our lopsided society," she came back quickly. "Wrinkles add character to men. When they show up on women, men think we're all ready to go out to pasture."

"Nonsense," Barry reassured her. "I think women are like fine wines. They're better when they've aged."

"Bullshit," Carol snorted. "You might think the wine tastes better, but like any other man, you're going to start noticing more shapely and attractive bottles."

Barry leaned his chest against her back, cupped her full breasts in his hands. "The way you turn me on, I'll still be horny for you when we're in our nineties."

"Will you have that promise notarized?" Carol smiled at him in the mirror.

"Get out your seal," Barry said, gently kneading the soft mounds of flesh.

"Oh, no, you don't," Carol laughed. "I'm a notary

public in Minnesota, not Arizona. You're trying to slip out by a legal technicality."

"We'll stop by the Valley National Bank on the way to the zoo and have someone there notarize my pledge of everlasting horniness for you."

Carol's eyes narrowed. "If we stop by the Valley Bank, it would be so that you could ogle that brunette teller."

Barry sighed, wilting inwardly. "I am not in the slightest attracted to that woman."

"You have this thing about brunettes; I can see it so plainly," Carol accused him.

It was an old charge. One she levied often. Barry had no idea how or when she had decided that he had an obsession for brunette women.

"Hair color has never meant a thing to me," he protested. "God, I've never been so shallow that I would judge someone either way by the color of her hair."

"Would you like me to dye my hair black or get a dark wig?" Carol asked the familiar question.

Barry returned with his stock answer to her neurosis: "Dye your hair purple, baby. I'd love you if you were purple haired, green haired, or bald."

The doorbell mercifully intruded on a discussion that Barry always found exasperatingly interminable. Carol was one who nurtured her favorite misconceptions and trotted them out from time to time for inspection and to see how they had grown.

"I'll get it!" Bobby yelled from his room.

"Your father will get it!" Carol corrected him. "You be sure that you've gone to the potty before we leave for the zoo."

Barry left the bedroom and crossed the Italian marble to the front door. He was astonished to open the door and see Don Red Fox standing there.

"Jacobs," the Indian said before Barry could utter a sound, "I fear that you and your family may be in very grave danger."

Barry tried for dismissal of the ominous pronouncement with a feeble ripple of laughter. "You have a hell of an effective manner of grabbing a man's attention," he scowled.

"May I come in?" Red Fox asked.

Barry studied the man's soft brown eyes, his broken nose. Red Fox was wearing a plaid shirt, open at the neck to display a beaded medallion. A leather bag hung from the belt, and his jeans had been stitched at the sides with silver conches. Barry recalled Cal's assessment of Don Red Fox. Was the Mesquakie a crazy Indian?

"We were just leaving," Barry said. "We were going to take Bobby to the zoo."

"I mean it, Jacobs," Red Fox said firmly. "This is important. I think you and your family are in danger."

From a crazy Indian? Barry's eyes narrowed, and he was aware of the large droplets of sweat wetting his sideburns. What if this man were really dangerous? My God, why let him in the house?

"For two nights I have had a dream, a terrible dream," Red Fox told him. "It is a dream of death. I must talk to you."

Barry felt his flesh prickling. The Indian must be crazy, talking about nightmares and killing.

Cal Hawkins just might be right. Red Fox may have been spending his evenings in some demented or drugged state—didn't these Indians chew peyote buttons?—and going around collecting the artifacts from the pot hunters during midnight raids. The best thing he could do right now was to slam the door in Red Fox's face and telephone the police.

As if reading Barry's thoughts, Red Fox grabbed the edge of the door. "Please, Jacobs! Let me come in."

Barry gritted his teeth in anger and determination. He was about to pull the door closed on the Indian's

fingers, when Bobby pushed by his legs and joined Red Fox on the front step.

"Hi, Mr. Red Fox," the boy greeted the man happily as if they were old friends. "Are you going to come with us to the zoo?"

Jesus! Now what was he going to do? Barry's brain shrieked in alarm. The boy was outside with Red Fox. There was no way that he could pull the door closed against the Mesquakie's restraining grip and yank Bobby back inside at the same time.

"Bobby, I've got something important to tell your daddy and mommy," Red Fox told the boy. "I must talk to them before they take you to the zoo."

"Come inside then," Bobby shrugged with an eleven-year-old's hospitality and insensitivity to his society's self-imposed restrictions and judgments. "It's hot out here," he said, mimicking grown-up talk. "It would be more comfortable talking inside."

Red Fox's eyes pleaded with Barry's fearful reluctance to admit him into the home that he had come to save.

"Come in, then," Barry decided at last. "But only for a few minutes."

"I will leave when you ask me to leave," Red Fox promised. Bobby had taken him by the hand and was leading him inside.

Carol had come to see who was at the door and to learn what was taking Barry so long. Her eyes widened in astonishment when she saw her son ushering in the man about whom they had only minutes before been speculating concerning his potential as a murderer.

"Barry?" The uttering of his name was a plea for reassurance.

"Don Red Fox wants to tell us about a dream he has been having," Barry said. "Let's be courteous and listen to him."

Barry hoped that Carol was getting his unspoken

message: humor the man until we can get him the hell out of our house!

"He has promised to leave as soon as he has told us about his dream," Barry added. Carol, damn it! He has your son by the hand. Be calm.

Carol had not missed the fact that Bobby was walking hand in hand with the man whom Cal Hawkins had suggested was a homicidal maniac.

Her voice was unsteady, but she flashed a professional smile. "How about some cold lemonade?" she asked. "I'm certain you would appreciate a cold drink in this heat, Mr. Fox—I mean, Red Fox."

Don sat in the easy chair to which he had been led by Bobby. "Please," he began. "Just listen to my dream. Once I have told it to you, you will either ask me to leave at once or to stay and help you. If you ask me to stay, we can then drink the lemonade."

Barry and Carol looked at each other helplessly. Barry nodded toward the sofa, and they seated themselves opposite their uninvited guest.

Barry managed a travesty of a smile, patted a space on the cushions next to him. "Come over here and sit beside me, Bobby." God, he had to get the boy away from the Mesquakie in case the man really should prove to be violent.

Bobby had his chin in his hands and was leaning his elbows on the arm of the easy chair. He was looking up at Red Fox with intense interest. "I wanna stay by Mr. Red Fox," he answered quietly.

The Mesquakie smiled, pushed the tip of his forefinger against Bobby's nose, playfully mashing it flat. "Bobby," he told him. "I want you to excuse us grown-ups and go to your room."

Before the boy could be shattered with disappointment and rejection, Red Fox added: "Then I will have a special talk with you."

Bobby slipped away, amazingly compliant. Just before he disappeared down the hallway, he said to Red Fox, "I'll be waiting in my room for you."

Barry chuckled, trying for an expression of a relaxed, natural attitude. "You seem to have quite a bit of influence with our son. Just before you rang the doorbell, in fact, he was saying how much he liked you."

Red Fox did not comment on Barry's obvious ploy. He had come for only one reason. He had come to warn them, not to ingratiate himself into their family circle.

"My dream took me first to see that one who wore the Ghost Shirt as he was when he also wore flesh. He stood before a wide river, his arms raised in supplication. It was apparent to me that he wanted to cross the river very badly."

Red Fox paused, as if expecting some comment from Barry or Carol.

Barry, with his salesman's sensitivity to the needs or expectations of the client, sensed the necessity of response. He leaned forward with his elbows on his knees. "Interesting," he said, but he avoided eye contact with Red Fox.

"I watched the man pacing back and forth on the riverbank," the Mesquakie continued. "I watched him pacing until the flesh fell from his bones, and he lay still, wrapped in his Ghost Shirt. Then I saw the spirit rise from his bones and dart for the river. I felt joy for the man, for now he would cross the river in spirit.

"But before he could reach the other side," Red Fox frowned in his recollection of the dream, "a black wind pushed him back to the prison of bones."

Barry rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "You said your dream told of danger to us, Don. I don't understand."

"There's more to the dream," Red Fox replied. "I saw houses being built all around where the skeleton lay. Then I saw those men and women, the pot-hunters, pulling at the man's bones. Each of them took some of the bones and went in different directions.

"In my dream," Red Fox continued, "nothing happened until the sun set. Then a terrible howling wind came from the place where the bones had lain. The wind changed into a wolf, a mountain lion, a coyote, an owl, a bear, a rattlesnake, a great flying bat, and each of the creatures went in a different direction after the pothunters. When the sun rose again, the wind creatures had brought back the bones and reassembled the skeleton."

Barry shifted uncomfortably. He thought of how the skull and the three pots had been mysteriously returned to the spot where the burial mound had been. He thought of what Dr. Buckland had told him about the *Chindi*. Carol made a small sound which told Barry that she was working on her own interpretation of the dream.

"Mr. and Mrs. Jacobs," Don called their attention back to his recounting of his dream-vision. "I believe that there is something other than a skeleton and some pots in that burial mound in your backyard. I first had the dream the night after the hassle over the desecration of the old grandfather. I was shocked the next day to read that Ed Gooch had died in a really bizarre kind of accident with his gamecock."

Barry found himself suddenly speaking to Red Fox in an unchecked and open manner. "And the skull was back with the rest of the skeleton when Professor Fredericks came the next morning."

Red Fox blinked at Barry, his heavy-lidded brown eyes asking a myriad of unspoken questions.

"We think he may have returned the skull before he was killed," Carol said, her voice quavering slightly. Something strange was going on all around her, and she wasn't really certain what role she had in the formless drama. "Like maybe his conscience got the better of him," she added.

"Sam and Merry Henderson are missing, according to Cal Hawkins," Barry announced, putting all his

cards on the table. "The three pots they took were back on the mound this morning."

Don Red Fox opened his mouth to speak, but Barry wasn't finished: "Hawkins thinks that you might have had something to do with Gooch's accident and the Hendersons' disappearance."

Red Fox nodded, as if in agreement, but the tone of his voice was sarcastic. "I brought the skull back, but I left it with the skeleton for someone else to cart off. The pots I really didn't care about, but I made it a point to bring them back, also."

Relieved at the Indian's sardonic dismissal of Hawkins's charges, Barry grinned. "It didn't make sense to me, either."

Carol nervously leaned forward on the sofa, and the stridency of her voice demanded that they return to basics: "Then what did bring back the skull and the pots? What is that black wind you think is haunting our backyard?"

"Are you suggesting some kind of old Indian curse?" Barry asked. "Isn't that a bit farfetched?" He hoped that he had sounded like a twentieth-century voice of reason. He really did not want such disagreeable things in his reality. He was not a Dr. Buckland, confident of his ability to live in more than one world at a time.

"Now that you have told me about the return of the skull and the three pots," Red Fox said quietly, "I am even more frightened and worried."

"Barry," Carol protested the eerie suspense that Red Fox was creating in their living room. She knew that whatever was being formed now in the full light of afternoon would become a horror of indescribable proportions after dark.

"Come on, Red Fox," Barry said pointedly. "Spare us the spooky buildup. You've got our attention."

Red Fox closed his eyes and nodded in agreement. "I had the dream a second time last night. Let me tell you what my dream means to me. Or," he correct-

ed himself, "what it *meant* to me. Now I am not so certain.

"The man in the Ghost Shirt, whose remains were discovered in your backyard, seems somehow bound to the earth. His spirit has not been able to cross the great river to the Land of the Grandfathers and Grandmothers."

"Is that heaven?" Carol wanted to know.

"Close enough for purposes of conversation," Red Fox answered. "It seemed to me that the black wind that was keeping his spirit here represented an improper deed, an unnatural desire, or an inadequate burial observance. When I saw the black wind forming itself into various predators, I believed that such a transformation meant that the spirit was capable of harming those who disturbed his rest without helping him to cross over to the Land of the Grandfathers and Grandmothers."

Barry cleared his throat. "You're speaking in past tense. What do you believe now?"

"I am puzzled by whatever agency has been returning the things to the mound," Don admitted. "It was my intention to ask your immediate cooperation in getting Professor Fredericks to turn over the skeleton to me at once so that I might lay the bones to rest with a proper burial ritual. I feared that Gooch's strange death may actually have been caused by the spirit of that grandfather in the Ghost Shirt."

Don Red Fox rose from the easy chair to which Bobby had ushered him and walked to the large window that looked out over the backyard, the newly filled swimming pool, and the now empty burial mound. Poised on the arch of the hump, as if they were three silent sentinels, were the pots that Sam and Merry Henderson had borne away from the yard as their share of the booty.

"What could have so much power that it could bring the skull and the pots back to the mound?" Red Fox wondered aloud.

"A guilty conscience," Barry sighed, rising to his feet and dropping his arms noisily to his sides. "A guilty conscience in one case and greed in the other. And you, Red Fox, inspired both reactions."

Don turned to face Barry, his forehead wrinkled with lack of comprehension.

"Ed Gooch knew that he had crossed Cal Hawkins," Barry said, presenting his thesis in a confident manner. "Fredericks told me that Hawkins is king of the pothunters. Others of these glorified grave robbers might pick up a few dollars during the course of a year, but Hawkins, and those who dig with him, make big bucks. Gooch got to thinking it over, and he used his brains for perhaps one of the few times in his life. He brought the skull back so that he would be able to get back in Cal's good graces."

Carol was smiling, and her voice was steady once again. "That makes sense, Barry," she approved. "Good sense."

Barry, pleased with Carol's approval, felt that his theory was much more logical and satisfactory than accepting the testimony of bad dreams and the murky legends of curses.

Don Red Fox pursed his lips. "And the Hendersons brought back the pots because I touched their tender Anglo consciences."

Barry shrugged noncommittally. "Something like that. They probably figured that I'd run the pots over to Fredericks for proper handling and labeling."

When Red Fox spoke again, his voice was calm, level. "Barry, Carol, I practice the traditional Medicine ways of my Mesquakie forefathers. My father is a hardworking farmer back on the Mesquakie settlement in Iowa. My mother is one of the tribal repositories of wisdom. The world of spirits is as real to me as the world of the Earth Mother. My dreams guide me, because, to me, they are one of the ways the Great Spirit talks to me. I see my entire life as an extended vision quest. I am a spiritual warrior."

"We respect your religion," Barry put in tentatively. He wasn't certain what kind of response was required of him.

Don Red Fox nodded. "Thank you. But I don't want you to *respect* my religion. I want you to *listen* to it. It is telling you that you are in danger. There is something out there in your backyard that has been disturbed. It is something very powerful."

"Don't start in on us with the ghost stories again, Don," Barry warned him. "We let you have your say. Now we have really had enough. I would appreciate it if you were to take those pots out of our yard. I mean, we have really had enough of this business."

Red Fox shook his head. "It does not feel right to me to take those pots, Barry. I plan to go into the Silence tonight. Tomorrow I will know better what to do. I will come by tomorrow, and we will talk again."

Barry lifted his eyes ceilingward in an ill-disguised gesture of impatience and thinly veiled disgust. "Very well," he said. "But if you don't pick the pots up then, I'm going to dispose of them my way."

Red Fox sensed that his audience with Barry and Carol had come to a close. As he moved toward the door with Barry flanking his right side, he remembered Bobby.

"Tell your son that I will return to have our talk tomorrow," Red Fox said, turning to wave at Carol.

"We're going to the zoo now," Barry said brusquely. "He'll soon forget about your promise. I just hope to hell that Carol will be able to forget about the primitive spook stories that you've spun for us."

Red Fox stepped out the door that Barry held open for him. "Barry," he cautioned him, "try to understand that in the world of spirit, there is no primitive, no modern. There is no time. There is only an Eternal Now."

Barry shook his head. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"It means," Red Fox told him, "that you may be sharing this small portion of the Earth Mother that you call home with a spirit and with a thing from out of time. Your time and their time may now have become one."

Barry laughed. "Sorry, Red Fox. I just do not choose to play your weird little game."

"It is not *my* game, Barry," Don said before he left the front door for the automobile he had rented. "And I am afraid that you have no choice whether or not you will play it."

Eighteen

Cal Hawkins squeezed three more drops of gun oil onto the pad of steel wool, then he began once again to rub the barrel of the old, rusted Sharps buffalo rifle.

"I normally only keep guns I can shoot," he told Ramon Quintana, "but I've always liked the look of these old buffler rifles. It would look damn nice over my fireplace. What ya think?"

Ramon had been drinking beer all day. He had had three beers since he arrived at Cal's place just a little over an hour ago.

"Where you think Sam and Merry is?" Ramon wanted to know. He didn't care about old guns.

Cal glanced up at the electric clock over his workbench. It was nearly five o'clock. He was getting worried as hell about the two kids.

"Sam don't go to the toilet without he tells you," Ramon argued. "You shoulda called the cops a long time ago."

Cal squinted along the barrel and spotted a small cluster of rust just three inches below the sight. "Sam's a big boy now, Ramon. Stop worryin' so."

Ramon crushed another empty Coors can in his thick fist. He mopped at his forehead with a red bandanna. "Don't you never turn on the air conditioning?" he complained.

"I keep it at eighty-one, Ramon. Haven't you heard there's an energy crisis? Just simmer down, man."

Ramon got up from the leather chair and began to pace before Cal's workbench. "I keep thinking about that damn Gooch getting his head cut off, and then I think about how we don't know where Sam and Merry is. And then I think about that goddamn asshole Jacobs telling me there is a curse on that old Indian mound."

"Ramon," Cal said quietly. "You think too much. Whyn't you crank up that heap of yours and run over to Beano's. Hell, man, punch the bag for a while. Maybe ride the bull. Then go out and get laid. Get your mind off things."

"Hell, man," Ramon accused him, "I know you are not as damn cool as you are pretending. Sam is like your own kid."

Cal bent hard to rub the steel wool along the barrel. The sonuvabitch Ramon was right. He had been so worried about Sam and Merry that he had had several loose bowel movements that afternoon. And why had Sam brought the pots back to the burial mound? There were just too many goddamn questions buzzing around inside his skull.

Kathy Miller came in through the Arcadia door that led to the pool. She had been carefully sunning herself on a reclining deck chair. "Mr. Sun is your enemy if he dries your skin out and gives you wrinkles," she always said as she rubbed what seemed to Cal to be quarts of lotion into her skin.

"Heard anything from Sam and Merry yet?" she asked.

"Not a thing," Cal answered.

Kathy walked to the bar to fix herself a drink, probably a margarita. Her full breasts were barely

restrained by the top of the white terry-cloth bikini. Her pert round behind peeped tantalizingly free of the bottoms. Ramon was making a conscious effort to avoid staring.

"Can I get you a beer or something?" Kathy asked the men.

"Ramon was just on his way to Beano's," Cal said firmly. He wanted to get the Chicano on the road so that he could corner Kathy for some physical distraction before she left for work. He had long ago learned about the healing quality of a woman's body. There was nothing like full breasts, moist lips, and warm, open thighs to ease tension, cure headaches, and terminate nearly every ailment known to man.

Ramon nodded. Kathy's charisma had got to him. The sight of her nearly nude, voluptuous body had set his brain on fire. He hoped that there would be a lot of single foxes at Beano's tonight.

"You let me know the minute you hear from Sam," Ramon said, getting to his feet. He tossed the crushed beer can in a wastebasket at the foot of the stool on which Cal was sitting polishing the Sharps. "Page me at Beano's the minute you hear."

"Chalk up one zoo trip to the red-man's revenge," Barry said bitterly as he turned the car into their driveway.

Bobby had been whining and distracted throughout their entire tour of the extensive Phoenix zoo. He had cried before they had left home, blaming them for not permitting Red Fox to tell him the story he had been promised. It seemed that not even the panthers, the baby gorilla, and the monstrously large alligators could begin to compare with the story he had never heard from the Mesquakie.

As for Barry and Carol, it seemed that neither of them could separate Don Red Fox's superstitious view of reality from their own. They both felt jumpy, haunted by some atavistic fear of the unknown.

"How about some ice cream when we get inside, honey?" Carol offered her son, who had forsaken his normal perch in the back seat of their Oldsmobile Cutlass to sit in her lap and lean his head against her breasts. Regressive behavior in the aftermath of intense disappointment.

"Okay." The voice was indifferent but at least interested.

Barry braked the Olds, shut off the ignition and the headlights. It was growing dark after another of Arizona's magnificent sunsets.

Carol took Bobby's hand and began walking toward the front door. Barry thought of Don Red Fox's vision, of a restless spirit venturing forth after dark. As if to challenge that primitive world view and to affirm his rightful position in the Space Age, Barry decided to visit the burial mound before he went inside.

"Do you have your key, hon?" he called to Carol who was nearly at the door with Bobby in tow.

"Yes," she answered. "It's in my purse."

"Okay, then," he told her. "I'm going to check the pool motor before I come in."

It seemed to have grown incredibly dark in the few moments it took Barry to open the gate and to walk to the burial mound.

He glanced toward the house and was reassured by the lights that Carol had turned on in the family room and the kitchen. In case she might look out, Barry walked to the pool motor and made a show of checking various switches and dials, about which he knew absolutely nothing.

The three pots sat atop the mound like sentries at a desolate, forgotten outpost. Barry stood looking into the hole from which the skeleton had been removed.

The flesh of his legs prickled, and a chilling sensation moved up his spine. Had he heard a strange, whooshing sound coming from within the mound? Didn't it sound like deep, labored breathing?

The hot Arizona night pulled the sweat from his body, but he felt strangely cold next to the mound.

God, good God! A moan. There was a sound like a moan coming from within the mound.

No, not a moan. It was that whooshing, breathing sound again, and it was getting louder. And moaning, like a wind building in intensity.

Jesus! Barry gasped as a swirling rush of wind spun sand, dust, dirt, bits of paper, dried grass—and a ghastly, putrid smell—all around him. God! A rotten, wretched odor that made him gag.

He could stand it no longer. He ran for the back door of the house as though it were his only hope of salvation.

Goddamn, he cursed as he threw his full body weight against the door, locked! The damn door was locked! Shouting his fear and his rage, he pounded his fists against the thin wooden panel.

Carol opened the door, confused, irritated at first. But now she was laughing at him.

He pushed inside, slamming the door behind him.

It took him several moments to realize that Carol was indeed laughing. She seemed to know nothing of the horror, the terror, that he had faced.

“Look at you,” she smiled. “You are covered with dirt and sand.” She brushed bits of crushed leaves from his shoulder, picked grass from his hair. “What happened to you?”

Barry could only blink. He was still struck dumb by the wretched stench fouling his nostrils and convulsing his throat.

“You’d better shower,” Carol advised him. “I’ll bet you got caught by a dust devil. I’ll bet one just now tore across our yard. Someone on television today was talking about how those dust devils just seem to spring up anywhere, instantly. They can really leave a mess in your pool, he said. And dust storms! During the monsoon season they can come on with hardly a moment’s notice and make driving impossible. The

man said you just have to sit in your car until they pass . . .”

Carol was talking on about all she had learned that day about dust devils and dust storms.

Barry needed a stiff drink. Maybe someday, when they were both in their eighties, he would tell her what he thought he had encountered out by the burial mound that night. Then they would both laugh about the dust devil that had so completely blackened his face and sanded his body.

Don Red Fox had made his smoke in the four directions and called upon the group spirit from the winged beings, the four-legged beings, the swimming beings, and the two-legged guides to assist him in his Medicine vision. A traditionalist who made only positive compromises with the twentieth century, Don had put on a cassette of drum and flute music to aid him in going into the Silence.

He lay down on his back on a large piece of deer-skin which he had lain over a blanket. He focused on a dark spot on the ceiling of the sparsely furnished room which he was renting during his stay in Phoenix.

After about fifteen minutes he felt himself slipping into the Time that was No Time and All Time.

Someone was singing a death song.

There were many, many Indians lying frozen and twisted in the snow.

Someone was singing a death song.

The man in the Ghost Shirt was lying bleeding on the sand.

Someone was singing another song, a strange song.

Something was being born.

Something that was a dark cloud, a black, swirling wind.

A wind that became a wolf, a coyote, an owl, a bear, a rattlesnake.

Something that was every thing and no thing.

Someone was singing a death song. The man in the Ghost Shirt was chanting in a high, keening voice. "Let me go to the Land of the Grandfathers and the Grandmothers! Let me go in peace!"

The man in the Ghost Shirt turned to walk away. Something dark and hideous was clutching his back. Something that would not let go.

Someone was singing a death song.

Three young Navajo men were building a mound, a mound that suddenly split open to release a skeleton in a Ghost Shirt. And something dark and hideous was still clutching at the skeleton's back.

Ramon Quintana had never thought that he could be so lucky in one night. Cal had certainly been correct in telling him to go to Beano's.

First there had been the blonde who had watched him punch the bag. She was kind of young and kind of skinny, but she was a sexy *gringa*, who "oohed" any "ahhed" at the way he slugged the bag. He worked on the leather until he left bits of skin and blood from his knuckles all over it.

He bought her a beer, and she let him squeeze her inner thigh and rub her nipples through her blouse. After another beer she had gone with him to his pickup.

Ramon had got right down to business. Some cowboys got really uptight if a Mexican messed around with a *gringa*, so he wasn't about to dally or to glory too long in his good fortune.

She had wanted to go down on him, but he peeled off her blue jeans and pushed her back on the seat. He rolled a rubber over his stiffened penis and moved between her skinny thighs. She was built small and tight so that helped him come fast. Ramon figured that they were back inside Beano's in about fifteen minutes.

Then his second good fortune of the evening occurred.

"The bartender said that you could fix me up with some authentic Indian pottery."

Ramon turned to look into the face of a tall, thin man whose complexion was as yellowed and dry as old parchment. He wore new blue jeans, new pointed-toe boots, and a new plaid shirt with a red neckerchief. He was an instantly recognizable breed of newly arrived, early season, Snowbird Sucker. The Snowbirds usually didn't fly in for another three weeks, early October at the soonest.

"You talkin' to me?" Ramon liked to play it cool.

The *tourista* jerked back as if threatened physically by the glowering, thick-bodied Mexican leaning against the bar.

Ramon decided that he had come on a bit too strong. He broke into a wide grin, made clownlike by the gap in his front teeth: "You must be talkin' to me since I am the only one standing here beside you."

The man smiled, reassured. He leaned forward on his elbows and slid closer to Ramon. "I'm seriously in the market for some authentic Indian pots."

"Sure," Ramon nodded. He took a long swallow of draft Coors from the tall glass with "*Beano's*" printed on its side. He started to wipe his mouth with the back of a hand, then he remembered that Beano's was a class joint. He picked up one of the small napkins with Beano's caricature printed on it and wiped the foam from his lips. He smiled in a warm rush of memory when he saw that some of the skinny blonde's lipstick had smudged a corner of his mouth.

"Sure," he repeated for the *tourista*. "I can get you pots. How many you want?"

"You got any Mimbres pots?" the man whispered, suddenly conspiratorial.

"Sure," Ramon lied. "I got two out in my pickup right now." This Snowbird wouldn't be able to tell a Mimbres pot from a Navajo piss pot.

"Fantastic!" the man gasped. "My God, how fortunate I am to have come here tonight. Audrey—that's

my wife—said I was just going here to leer at the cowgirls and drink. But I told her if you're going to find pots—authentic Indian pots, that is—then you've got to hang out where the real dealers and collectors hang out. Wasn't I right?"

Ramon gently punched the man's thin chest with one of his pudgy forefingers. "You are one hell of a smart dude," he winked in false compliment. "And I bet you're gonna be one tough *hombre* to bargain with."

The Snowbird shrugged. "I respect the fact that you've probably gone to a lot of work to get those pots. I'll probably give you what you ask. I mean, unless it's way out of line."

Ramon blinked in wonderment. This evening was too good to be true. He was going to get to screw both a *gringa* and a *gringo* in the same hour.

Ramon finished his beer and led his client out to his battered pickup. He still had the two pots from the Jacobs dig in his wooden utility box in the back end. Wrapped carefully in a blanket were two, maybe three, other pots from earlier excavations.

"My name is Walter Mortenson," the man was saying. "I'm from Stevens Point, Wisconsin. My wife and I have a winter place in Mesa. If your prices are right, I'd like to buy enough pots from you to fill my Christmas shopping list."

Ramon dug into his jeans pocket for the key to the padlock on the utility box. "Hey, man, that sounds terrific. You come to the right man, okay. Ramon will get you all the pots you want."

Ramon was just cocking a leg over the side of the pickup, getting ready to pull himself into the rusted bed, when a large desert owl swooped down from the night sky and raked his face with its talons.

Ramon screamed in agony as blood oozed from the scratches along his cheekbone. He stumbled backward and fell heavily in the gravel of Beano's parking lot.

"Jesus Christ!" Mortenson gasped. "What in hell's name was that?"

Then it was on Ramon again, a piercing squeal issuing from its snapping beak. Long, hard talons tore at Ramon's scalp, his face, trying to get at his eyes. The owl's wings beat furiously, as if it were trying to lock talons into Ramon's flesh and fly away with him.

Ramon was writhing on the gravel, trying desperately to strike the winged fury that was besetting him.

"Help me, goddamn it!" he shouted at Mortenson between screams of pain and shouts of rage.

Mortenson stood as if transfixed by the incredible scene of violence unfolding before him. The owl was huge, damn near as big as an eagle. He had never heard of owls attacking people for no discernible reason. He had never heard an owl shrieking like this one, not even the screech owls back in Wisconsin.

Mortenson had nearly screwed up his courage to the point of coming to Ramon's assistance when the viciously attacking owl was joined by another hideously squealing winged marauder.

The sounds of their combined attack were nightmarish, monstrous; shrieking cries, furiously beating wings, ripping beaks, clawing talons.

As he watched in horror, Mortenson saw the hooked beaks gouging away pieces of Ramon's face and throat. He saw the powerful, clutching talons tear away shreds of scalp, cheek, hand, arm, clothing. And in one horrible moment that he would remember forever, he saw the unrelenting talons slice an eyeball and scrape it from the socket.

Mortenson had had enough. He began to scream and to run wildly from the scene of the attack.

Two cowboys were walking unsteadily toward their jeep. "What the hell's wrong with you, dude?" The stocky, red-faced one asked as he grabbed Mortenson by the arm.

"Shit awmighty!" his friend shouted. "Lookee over by that old red pickup. Two big desert owls got some bastard on the ground."

The cowboys let Mortenson go, and they ran toward the screaming, desperately flailing Ramon.

Before they could reach him, two more large gray owls appeared, screeching and swooping at them. One of the men had his hat carried off by the reinforcements from the night sky.

"My Gawd, Hank," the red-faced one shouted, swinging his thick arms at the owl worrying him. "It's a fucking attack of the owls. I tole you that nature would turn on us one day!"

"Shee-it, Tubby," Hank snorted, running bare-headed for their jeep, "I'm getting the Winchester twelve guage from the backseat, and I'm gonna blow these mothers away!"

By the time Hank had levered a shell into the chamber and returned to Ramon's pickup, the Mexican was no longer struggling. The heels of his boots were spasmodically kicking at the gravel, and the fingers of his left hand were twitching weakly. All four of the large owls were ripping open his chest.

Hank knelt several feet away, scooped up a handful of gravel, tossed it at the owls in an attempt to frighten them away from the downed man. "Heyooo!" he shouted, as the gravel sprayed the large birds.

As soon as one of the owls got clear of Ramon, Hank pulled the trigger. The owl exploded in a fiery hail of bird shot.

The heavy roar of the 12 guage startled two of the other birds, and Hank expertly worked the slide twice and blasted both of them out of the night sky.

The fourth owl turned to look at Hank as he approached the carnage, shotgun at the ready. Its dead eyes were defiant; its beak thoroughly soiled and dripping with the Mexican's blood. It sat atop the man's chest, its talons working themselves deep into the warm, pulsing muscle of Ramon Quintana's dying heart.

Hank stopped in his sighting of the shotgun. He had never seen so large a desert owl. And those large unblinking eyes. Dead eyes. Dead eyes staring at him.

It was as if he were mesmerized, and even Tubby's shout of alarm could not remove him from the trance which had befogged him. He seemed indifferent to the fact that the incredibly large owl was now flying directly for him. He had forgotten that the shotgun he held in his hands was a weapon. He had forgotten how to pull the trigger.

The owl struck him in the forehead, its sharp talons raking deep furrows in the soft flesh, its feathered impact knocking him flat on his back.

When Hank regained consciousness, there were dozens of men and women crowding around the dead Mexican. He heard some people retching. A woman was sobbing hysterically. Men were cursing in disbelief.

Tubby was kneeling at his side. "There's an ambulance coming for you, Hank. That poor Mex'can bastard won't need it. Them owls ate away his face and ripped out his heart!"

Nineteen



"Whadya mean, doorbell?" Barry Jacobs had no idea what a doorbell was. He was somewhere deep within the convolutions of his unconscious, vibrating deliciously in dream-state brain waves.

Carol was shaking his shoulder. The bedroom solidified, took on special significance. He knew where he was. He knew what a doorbell was.

"The doorbell? Someone's ringing the doorbell? Who in hell is ringing our doorbell?"

With a great effort he focused on the bedside clock's luminous dial and understood that it was three seventeen or thereabouts.

Carol propped herself up on her right elbow, and one large breast moved free of the nightgown. The nipple eye looked at him seductively, invitingly.

"Do you want me to go see who it is?" She knew that he had five beers before he went to bed. He had been upset about something he had chosen not to discuss.

His manhood threatened by the thought that his wife would face the nighttime dangers of the ringing doorbell while he remained snug in the sheets, Barry grunted and heaved his feet over the edge of the king-sized bed. To hell with a robe, but he did check

to see if he had on his pajama bottoms. He wedged his feet into his slippers and padded to the front door.

"Goddamn it, Red Fox," he moaned when he opened the front door. "What the hell is this? A midnight scalp raid? I've got a good mind to call the cops. I mean it now, man. Get the hell away from my door."

Don Red Fox let the words fall from Barry in a blur of sound. He could not risk letting Barry slam the door in his face before the man had heard why he had come there in the middle of the night. Drowsy, bewildered, angry men were not interested in rhetoric. Only damn good reasons why they had been awakened, their privacy invaded.

"Ramon Quintana was killed tonight. Ripped apart by desert owls. I heard it on the midnight news."

"Desert owls?" Barry repeated the words as if he were learning an incomprehensible foreign language. His face seemed to reflect an inner struggle of enormous personal implications.

"May I come in?" Red Fox asked.

Barry was instantly tense, visibly wary.

The Mesquakie knew that the man distrusted him. But more than that Jacobs seemed also to fear him.

"Can you understand that I am your friend?" Red Fox asked. "I have come to help you."

Barry nodded dumbly and stepped aside. Red Fox quickly took advantage of his acquiescence to gain admittance into the house.

"Barry," Red Fox got immediately to the point while Jacobs was closing the door. "Have you checked the mound at all tonight?"

"Why, yes, I did," Barry admitted. "Right after we got home from the zoo."

"What time was that?"

Barry shrugged. "About sunset, I guess."

"Did you hear or see anything unusual around the mound?"

Barry thought of the wind, the moaning sound, the terrible odor. "No."

"You hesitated," the observant Red Fox challenged him.

"I was thinking!" Barry snapped, defensive, irritated. Who the hell was this Indian to barge into his home in the middle of the night and start questioning him?

"Let's check the mound again, now," Red Fox said.

A chill prickled the flesh of Barry's legs and back. "Why the hell should we?"

"Why shouldn't we?" Red Fox checkmated again.

"Well, damn it." Barry decided to end the chess game. "This is my property. And I say that we do not go out there at four in the morning. And furthermore I say you get the hell out of my house before I call the goddamn police."

Carol was at the door of their bedroom, squeezing the top of a dressing gown together at her neck.

"If you want me to call the police, Barry," she said, aligning herself squarely on the side of her husband, "let me know. I'll do it right now."

"Please, Carol, Barry," Don pleaded. "Please hear me out. Ramon Quintana was horribly killed tonight." He repeated the news of Ramon's death for the benefit of Carol who had not heard his prior announcement. Her attractive features visibly registered shock.

"Ed Gooch got his head nearly cut off. Sam and Merry Henderson are missing," Red Fox said, pressing his case, getting it all said before they threw him out or called the police. "After Gooch's death the skull came back. After Sam and Merry disappeared, the three pots came back. If the two pots Ramon took are back there on that burial mound, then I believe I know what is killing these people and returning the artifacts to your backyard."

"You, probably!" Barry said, his voice quavering as he gave expression to the terrible accusation. Now Red Fox understood the fear in Jacobs's eyes.

"That's crazy, man," the Indian protested. "A dozen people saw the owls attacking Ramon tonight. A cowboy shot three of the things. There was a witness to Gooch's death, as well. And like you said, I only wanted the skeleton. Why would I grab the skull from Gooch—if I *had* done him in—and take it back here?"

Barry waved a hand before him and shook his head in confusion. "Okay. Okay. I mean, I never really believed that you could kill anyone. You really seem to be the nonviolent man of peace you said you were the first night you showed up here. Cal Hawkins said a few things that got me to thinking otherwise for a while. But, man, weird things are happening!"

Red Fox nodded understandingly. "Carol, I know I'm being a terrible boor, crashing into your home like this. But would you mind if we had some coffee and talked? I really believe that what I am about to say is terribly important to you. If you show me where the makings are, I'll be happy to fix the coffee."

Carol shook her head and managed a weak smile. "I'll do it, Don." It was the first time that she had used his first name. "But please try to tell us what is going on around here."

Don followed Carol and Barry back to their kitchen. He noticed that there was an excellent view of the backyard and the burial mound from this room. He went to the window, probed the darkness for a moment or two before he seated himself beside Barry at a small, round table.

"Tonight, as I told you, I sought a Medicine vision," Don said. "I went into the Silence and sought to tune in to the burial mound and the mystery of the returning objects. I saw clearly the man who wore the Ghost Shirt, and I again saw the black wind."

Barry tipped over the saltshaker that he had been toying with as he listened to Don speak.

"Is there something troubling you, Barry?" Don asked.

"I'm sorry," Barry replied. "I'm clumsy. Didn't mean to interrupt your story."

Don looked at his reluctant host for several moments before he continued. "As I told you, as a Mesquakie my personal religion is the Old Ways of my forefathers. Many of us on the Mesquakie settlement in Iowa practice traditional Medicine as close to the tribal beliefs of the past as we possibly can. We also respect very much the spiritual beliefs—the Medicine ways—of the traditional brothers and sisters in other tribes. Because I have made a special study of the traditional ways of many tribes, I was appointed to ask the museums of this country to return the bones of the old grandfathers and grandmothers for proper burial."

Barry had been scooping the spilled salt across the table top with a cupped hand and letting the grains fall onto a napkin on his lap. "You told me about your work . . . your mission, Don. And if this is all leading up to my promise to help you get the bones back from Professor Fredericks, I told you that I would do my best as soon as he has indicated that his study is complete."

Don smiled. "I guess I was just following the white man's way and presenting my credentials as an expert on the traditional spiritual values and beliefs of the Native American. I'll get right to the point:

"The very greatest of the Navajo Medicine men have long had the ability to sing into existence a *Chindi*, a guardian spirit, to do their bidding. They can send this *Chindi* even to faraway places to work justice on those who have wronged the Medicine man or his people."

Barry felt a prickling at the base of his skull. Dr. Buckland recognized that there were Medicine men

who might cultivate certain powers considered supernatural by white culture. He had said that a *Chindi* could be set to watch over a grave. Barry remembered the Long Salt family—over a hundred men and women killed by a curse set against them.

Carol set a cup of coffee before each of the men, then turned to pick up the cup she had poured for herself. "I don't know too much about such things," she admitted, "but it sort of sounds as though you are describing a witch and her familiar spirit."

Don nodded. "From my study of the European Old Ways, the *Chindi* is a lot like a familiar spirit. The *Chindi* is also very sensitive about the way one respects the Earth Mother. In that sense it is like an avenging angel. If one shows disrespect to any of the Earth Mother's creatures, the *Chindi* may seek retribution."

"What does the *Chindi* look like—supposedly?" Barry asked, trying hard not to look too interested in Red Fox's story.

"It can assume any shape," Don Red Fox answered. Then he shook his head in self-correction. "No, more correctly stated, it can *inhabit* any living thing. Almost any Navajo, a traditional one, especially, has at least one *Chindi* story to tell. He'll tell you about driving home at night and seeing a coyote walking on its hind legs."

"Its hind legs?" Carol echoed.

"Yes," Don said over the rim of his coffee cup. "That's one of the ways of knowing that an animal harbors a *Chindi*. It will be walking on its hind legs. The other sure way of identifying an animal possessed by a *Chindi* is the fact that its eyes will appear dead. Like, if the headlights sweep the animal, its eyes will not reflect light. They'll just look flat, dead."

"So what happens if you meet a *Chindi* while walking home some night?" Barry wanted to know. "Will it attack you?"

Don shook his head. "Not necessarily. It will depend upon your attitude toward the Earth Mother and whether you have a good heart. But even if you think you have your act pretty well together, it would be best to draw a Medicine circle around yourself and to make a particular song or chant."

Don sipped at his coffee, then set the cup back on its saucer. "If you have desecrated the Earth Mother in any way or if a *Chindi* has been set against you for any reason, you can only stop the energy by a Medicine circle, a powerful song, or by maintaining such a pure heart that it will boomerang and return to the one who sent it."

"But if you don't know how to draw a Medicine circle or sing the right song and if you are a little bit of a bastard like most of the other clods on this terrestrial ball, how do you stop a *Chindi*?" Barry persisted. "With a silver bullet?"

"Any kind of bullet will kill the host animal," Don explained soberly, "but there is *no* kind of bullet that will stop the *Chindi*. If you kill the host animal, the *Chindi* will simply enter another. And another and another. Until it has wreaked its vengeance upon you."

Barry was not pleased with this bit of intelligence. "Okay, Don, besides ruining our sleep and scaring hell out of us with your spooky bit of Indian folklore, what is the point?"

Carol had been leaning against the counter, quietly sipping her coffee. "I think I can guess, Barry," she said in a soft, almost wistful, voice. "Don believes that we have got a *Chindi* in our backyard."

There was an urgency in Don's reply: "Yes. And I believe that the *Chindi* has killed Ed Gooch, Sam and Merry Henderson, and, now Ramon Quintana."

"Jesus H. Christ!" Barry growled. "Where do you get off pulling this primitive shit on us?"

Don would not be swayed from delivering the warning which he had come there at four in the

morning to issue. "And I believe that the *Chindi* will kill all those who defiled that burial mound unless we somehow appease it by returning all the objects and the skeleton to that grave."

Barry pushed his chair back from the table. "I have really had a bellyful of this shit!"

"My vision tonight showed me the old one with the Ghost Shirt bearing a terrible thing upon his back," Don persisted. "My vision showed me the old one trying hard to cross the Great River to the Land of the Grandfathers and Grandmothers. But always the black wind held him back. For some reason the *Chindi* is keeping the old one on the Earth Mother. We must learn why, so that we can free him and release the *Chindi*. We must do this before the *Chindi* kills again."

Barry got to his feet. "I'm having a vision of kicking your ass out of my house, man. Carol," he told his wife, "you get on the telephone and call the police!"

"Wait, Barry," Carol argued quietly. "What if he's right?"

Barry's mouth dropped open in surprise. Carol had always been Little Miss Actual Factual. "You can't be serious?" Barry questioned her.

"I'm deadly serious," Don said firmly. "Barry, will you walk out with me right now and see if the pots that Ramon took from the mound have been returned?"

Barry felt beads of sweat suddenly squeeze from the pores on his forehead. He had an unpleasant flash of the wind, the smell, the cold fear that had gripped his flesh.

Don picked up on the hesitation in Barry's manner, just as he had noticed it earlier. "You saw something out there tonight, didn't you, Barry?" Red Fox demanded of him. "You saw or heard or felt something when you checked the mound at sunset."

Carol made a small sound of knowing. "The wind," she remembered. "You were pounding on the door.

When I opened it, you were covered with sand and dirt. And Barry, you looked frightened."

Barry felt suddenly very lightheaded, and he sat back down in the kitchen chair. "It was a dust devil," he said in a voice that was nearly a whisper. "It was a dust devil, just like you said."

Don got to his feet, placed a hand on Barry's shoulder. "Barry," he asked, "will you go out with me to the burial mound?"

Barry looked at Carol, saw the expectancy, tinged with fear, that had animated her lovely face. God, whatever the hell was out there, he had to face it for her esteem.

If this was primitive bullshit, he had to face down Don Red Fox and his weird tales.

If there was something beyond their understanding in their backyard, then he had to face it together with Don Red Fox for the sake of Carol and Bobby.

"All right, damn it," he snapped, trying for as much bravado as possible. "Let's go out to the mound." He walked brusquely to a light switch, snapped on the patio lamp.

"You can see from here that there are only the same three pots that were there last night," Barry said.

Barry's confidence was returning as he stood looking out the window. Hell, wake any man out of a sound sleep and start pumping his head full of ghost stories, and the most rational of men would start to feel the surge of primitive fear tingling his scalp.

Don Red Fox walked to the back door. "Let's look closer."

It was the same old, intimidatng *macho* challenge. Did men never outgrow it? He had to join Red Fox and walk out the door, cross the backyard, and look into that open burial mound, just as he had had to follow Carl Swensen when he jumped off the barn roof into a pile of hay below, just as he had had to follow Bill Jennings when he jumped off the high

tower into the swimming pool below, just as he had had to . . .

"It's nearly dawn," Red Fox said as they walked toward the burial mound.

Barry grunted. He could see only the three pots. It appeared that Red Fox's ghost story was about to be vanquished by the first light of dawn and the first crowing of the cock.

"Okay, Red Fox," Barry smiled in easy triumph. "No pots, goddamn it. Now I want you to become another vanishing American and vanish the hell off my property."

Red Fox appeared to be listening to something other than the sound of Barry's voice.

"Hey, man, did you hear me?" Barry demanded.

Red Fox raised his hand. His voice was reverential. "Don't you hear it?"

It was there. Barry swallowed hard. The faraway sound of a flute. Now he heard a rattle. A drum. Someone was singing in a high, keening wail.

And then there was the wind, roaring, swirling all around them. Barry's eyes were stung by sand. When he was able to open them, two pots had joined the three that had stood as sentinels through the long night.

His knees were turning to water. The backyard was tilting peculiarly. A strong arm was circling his middle, helping him to walk. A strange sound was throbbing all around him.

He didn't realize until they were back in the kitchen that he had been hugging Don Red Fox across the shoulders as if he were a small boy clutching an adult for support. That was also when he recognized the strange, gasping, throbbing noise around him as that of the sound of his own weeping.

"We must warn the others," Don Red Fox said with finality. "Or the *Chindi* will kill them all."

Twenty

"I saw it all from the window," Carol repeated for the fourth time since Don Red Fox had helped Barry back into the kitchen. "I saw it, but I don't believe it."

"I believe it," Barry said with conviction. "But I don't understand it." His hand trembled as it lifted a fresh cup of coffee to his lips.

"The world of the spirits has always been as real to me as the world of people," Red Fox told them. "But it still filled me with awe when I saw the black cloud bringing back the pots."

"The pots were just swirling around and around, like they were caught in a tornado," Carol shuddered. "Barry, we're moving out of this house tomorrow!"

Barry caught the edge in his wife's voice. Carol seemed on the brink of hysteria. He had been tottering there himself just a few minutes ago.

"No," Red Fox said firmly. "No, there is no need for you to move."

"We aren't staying here with that thing in our backyard!" Carol's eyes brimmed with tears. "We aren't staying here to be ripped apart and killed."

Barry's brain flashed a montage of Ed Gooch's throat being slashed, Ramon Quintana being clawed

and ripped by desert owls, Sam and Merry Henderson being . . . God knew what!

"What do you mean, there's no need to move?" Barry challenged the Mesquakie.

"I will join with the old one's spirit and help him cross the Great River to the Land of the Grandfathers and Grandmothers," Red Fox said solemnly. "Then we will bury the bones on sacred land. I will conduct the proper ritual. When the *Chindi* sees that we intend no disrespect for the old one or the Earth Mother, it will leave this place."

"And go where?" Barry wondered.

Don shrugged. "You saw it tonight as an energy, an energy of swirling wind. Its energy can enter any living thing to perform its mission of revenge or protection. When it has been sent away, the energy once again becomes part of the *wakan*, the spirit force."

"And you think you can manage this all by yourself?" Carol's question was more of a plea.

"You can see that the *Chindi* is returning all the artifacts of the old one's burial, and it is punishing all those who desecrated the mound," Red Fox said. "We must find out the names of all those who took something from the mound so that we can return all objects. Once we have the burial artifacts and the bones back here, I can set about relocating the old one's place of rest."

"There was another Mexican," Barry scowled, prodding his memory. "And an old desert rat named Jack or Jake. There was Cal Hawkins, of course. And his girl friend."

"Cal will know everyone," Don said. "He seemed to have been in charge."

"Don't forget the professor from the university who took the skeleton," Carol reminded them. "You must warn him."

"God," Barry shook his head in a precognition of failure. "How will we convince him that an evil spirit is after the bones?"

"Demand the return of the bones," Carol told him. "The skeleton was found on our property. We want our property back!"

"Right on," Don agreed. "We have no time to lose. The *Chindi* is powerless during the day, but it will release its energy again tonight and go after another pot or the skeleton."

Barry disregarded the fact that the coffee was nearly scalding hot and took several large swallows before he set the cup down on its saucer.

"Jesus," he sighed. "It is 1979, and we're afraid of something that is out of the Dark Ages. Part of me is saying that I'm losing my marbles, and the other part is just plain scared shitless."

"What you feel is unimportant," Don told him. "But unless we get everything back here tonight, someone else is going to die. The *Chindi* will continue to do what it has been created to do until its mission is completed."

Don glanced out the window. "The sun has risen."

"It's a few minutes before six," Carol confirmed his statement by the clock on the microwave oven.

Don raised his hand for silence. His eyes had suddenly become very wide.

"What is it?" Carol asked, her lower lip quivering.

"What do you hear?" Barry scowled, looking around the kitchen as if seeking a hidden enemy. He felt the flesh crawling alongside his spine.

"The old one is here with us," Don answered them quietly.

Carol reached her hand across the table and clutched at Barry's fingers.

Don's eyes widened even further, and his head suddenly cocked itself to one side. His mouth opened and closed spasmodically, and small gurgling sounds began to issue from deep within his throat. At the same time his breathing rate accelerated rapidly, as if he were hyperventilating.

"Hey, man, come out of it!" Barry said, much

louder than he had intended. He had absolutely no idea what was happening around their kitchen table, but he was grimly aware that yet another situation over which he had no control was about to transpire before his troubled eyes.

"Barry." Carol was expressing similar feelings of complete helplessness. "What can we do? Is he having a heart attack?"

Barry hadn't thought of that, but he really did not believe that it was anything that simple.

Don began rocking back and forth on his chair, his eyes glazing over as if he were in a trance. Then he slumped forward, his head on his chest. He now sat very still.

"Barry?" Carol's voice was little more than a cry of fear and confusion.

Don Red Fox's head snapped up, and his eyes seemed to be regarding them as if for the first time. "*I . . . am . . . Moo . . . Moon Bear.*"

The voice was reed thin, and it sounded as though it was coming from deep within a cave.

Carol made another small sound, but Barry made a gesture that she should remain silent. He intertwined their fingers for mutual support.

"*Moon Bear. I have not spoken with the tongue for a very long time,*" the voice said in that strange, hollow whisper. "*I am using the voice somehow of this Medicine brother, Somehow it is that I think my thoughts, and he speaks them. I have felt the spirit of this Medicine brother, and I know that his heart is good.*"

Barry had once accompanied his grandmother to a spiritualist camp in Minnesota, and he had observed mediums speaking with the alleged voices of the dearly departed. It appeared that Don Red Fox was somehow serving as the medium for the spirit of the Indian whose skeleton had been found in the burial mound.

A few hours ago Barry would have thought any

form of mediumship to have been pathetic mumbo jumbo. He had thought so when he had been a boy of sixteen sitting beside his grandmother in a hot, darkened room and had listened to someone impersonate his grandfather. But now, after his witnessing of the *Chindi* returning the pots to the burial mound, he was willing to suspend his disbelief and listen to what the spirit that was allegedly manipulating Red Fox's vocal chords was telling them.

"It is strange to be in a man's body again," the voice mused from within Don Red Fox's sturdy frame. *"But I will not keep this brother's flesh. I want only to go to the Land of the Grandfathers and the Grandmothers."*

"Then why don't you?" Carol blurted, completely incorporated into the bizarre scenario that was playing itself out in her kitchen.

"The Thing that is Everything and No Thing will not permit me to cross the Great River," the voice said matter-of-factly.

"The *Chindi*?" Barry asked.

"I have heard it called that by the Navajo healer and now by the Medicine brother whose tongue I use."

"You can hear us and see us?" Carol's eyes were wide in uneasy wonder.

"Not before the shovels opened my burial mound. And then only dimly until this brother came. His spirit is like a flame that attracts me to its warmth. His spirit seemed to pull me toward him and told me that I could speak through him. The two of you are not bad people for white eyes. But your hearts are filled with fear and distrust. You do not walk in good balance."

Barry shifted uncomfortably on the wooden chair and narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

"Even now," the voice commented, *"you suspect that it is the Medicine brother speaking out to wound your feelings. Because you do not fully believe in the*

world of spirits, you do not believe that it is I, Moon Bear, speaking to you."

Carol leaned forward as if searching for the truth in Red Fox's eyes. "If you are Moon Bear," she said simply, "what have you to tell us?"

"The Thing that is No Thing will kill all, just as the Medicine brother has said. All my possessions must be returned. My Medicine bag. My Sharps rifle. The rest of the pots. Especially my bones."

"Why do you set that murdering monster on us?" Barry demanded of the voice.

Moon Bear snorted defensively. *"It is not I. You understand nothing of our ways if you think an Indian cares about pots and weapons when he has left the body. I care only to go to my grandfathers. It was the Navajo healer who set the Thing to watch after me while he went for help. The healer meant well. He meant only to protect my wounded body. But the young men buried me before he returned, and he has not yet come back to remove the Chindi-Thing from my side. The Chindi will watch after me for winters without end unless you find the healer to take him back!"*

Barry shook his head. "How can we find this man? When did you die?"

"I died when the old bearded white man shot me."

"In what year, he means," Carol explained.

Moon Bear sighed in exasperation. *"Only the white eyes mark time with such meaning."*

"You may have been dead a hundred years . . . winters!" Carol protested.

"I have been in a place between time," Moon Bear answered. *"I have no idea how many winters I have lain in that mound."*

"What can we do to help you?" Barry rejoined the unique conversation. "How can we help you to cross to the Land of the Grandfathers and Grandmothers?"

"Find the Navajo healer!"

"You don't understand," Carol's voice was again

reaching a strident pitch. "He may have been dead for a hundred years!"

"Then first help yourselves," Moon Bear told them. *"Return all my possessions and my bones before the Chindi kills all those who violated my resting place. And listen to me, woman! Know that your son has my Medicine neckpiece. It, too, must be returned!"*

Barry felt a tiny, sharp-clawed finger worrying his stomach. He had not yet told Carol that he had permitted Bobby to accept the medallion. He quickly scanned his memory to see if Red Fox had known that the boy had taken the beaded artifact from the grave.

"I have no control over the Chindi," Moon Bear continued. *"I cannot stop it from killing. When I walked the Earth Mother, I hated all white men with every sinew of my body. Here, in this place, where I await my time to cross the Great River, I have no hatred."*

"Then why does the Chindi hate us so?" Carol asked the voice.

"Neither does the Chindi hate," Moon Bear explained. *"It only does what it was created to do. It protects what remains of Moon Bear and his belongings. It hates no more than one can say the fire into which one has placed his hands hates him when it sears the flesh. Men have violated my burial mound. They have placed their hands in the fire."*

"We will get all those who took things from your burial place to bring them back," Carol assured him.

"That is your concern," Moon Bear said. *"While I do not hate you, neither do I really care whether the Chindi kills you. I now know what I only believed before. There is no death, only a change of worlds."*

"Then there is no chance of your interceding for us with the Chindi?" Barry asked.

Moon Bear laughed, a sound that was not unlike an old man's wheezing cough. *"It listens not to me. It does not even hear me. It hears only the echo of the*

healer telling it to guard me. Find the healer or sing his song or the Chindi will hold me forever."

"Sing his song?" Carol repeated. "There is a song that will keep the *Chindi* away from us?"

"Maybe the Medicine brother can sing it. I will let him come back now."

Red Fox's head dropped forward on his chest once again. A thin line of spittle ran down his chin from his open mouth. His eyes flickered beneath his lids.

Carol's impatient hand managed to be somewhat gentle as it reached out to shake the Mesquakie's shoulder. "Don, do you know a song that will keep the *Chindi* away?"

Barry observed the bobbing chin, the eyes that could not seem to open completely or focus on anything when they did peep out from under the lids.

"I don't think he's back with us yet," he told his wife.

Red Fox gave a start and made a sound like a snorer who had just been given a wake-up poke. He opened his eyes, blinked a couple of times against the kitchen light.

"What about the song?" Carol repeated her urgent question.

"Song?" Don frowned in puzzlement.

"You don't remember what Moon Bear said through you?" Barry was trying his best not to be skeptical or to regard the apparent mediumship of Red Fox as red-man's theatrics. The incredible materialization of the pots on the burial mound by the swirling wind had broadened his mental horizons enormously, but he still did not wish solely out of desperation to become gullible or to accept information gained by alleged supernatural means.

"Moon Bear," Red Fox echoed softly. "Ah, yes, the old one in the Ghost Shirt. I remember seeing him approach me."

Then it was as if Don were comprehending Barry's and Carol's questions for the first time. His hand

reached out for Barry's forearm, and his fingers were firm in their grip. "Tell me, did he speak through me?"

"Yes," Carol said without hesitation, instantly setting aside the Minnesota Lutheran prejudices of her early religious training. "The spirit said his name was Moon Bear and you were right about the *Chindi*. Moon Bear said it will kill everyone who desecrated his burial mound. He said maybe you knew a song to sing that would stop it."

Red Fox listened intently to Carol's breathless summation of the spontaneous séance. The thumb and forefinger of his right hand came up to squeeze and pull at his chin.

"If the *Chindi* was sung into existence, then we should be able to find the right Navajo chant to sing it away," he said after a few moments' deliberation.

"What the hell," Barry scowled. "Is there some kind of all-purpose Navajo songbook that has the lyrics to create and dispel monsters?"

Red Fox tapped the same forefinger to his temple. "The songbook is in here," he told Barry. "The proper song is inside the head of some Navajo Medicine man."

Barry shrugged helplessly. "But we aren't going to find such a Medicine man in the yellow pages, are we?"

"No," Don smiled. "But with my contacts among the Native American people here in Arizona, we will find him."

Carol slumped back in her chair and emitted a long sigh. Don had just given her the first ray of hope since the awful truth about the ancient horror in their backyard had fully penetrated her consciousness.

But then she frowned, tightened her lips, and pointed an accusing finger at her husband.

"What's this about Bobby having something from Moon Bear's grave?" she demanded.

Barry glanced at Red Fox before he replied. The

Indian gave no evidence of having had prior knowledge about the medallion. "Kathy Miller, Cal's girl friend, gave it to him. I was going to place it between two sheets of glass and hang it in his room."

"Please," Carol said firmly, "get the thing out of his room and put it back on the grave."

Barry nodded and looked away from the anger in her eyes. "We'd better start warning the others," he said to Red Fox.

"It's a few minutes past seven." Don glanced at the wristwatch he had set in a beaded band. "With all the tension squeezing our heads, I don't imagine there's any use suggesting that we get some sleep first."

Barry's laughter was a series of sardonic wheezes.

"That's what I thought," Red Fox went on. "So why don't we have some breakfast, then make some calls. I think it would be best if you saw Cal Hawkins. I'll try Professor Fredericks."

The sound of a toilet flushing told them that Bobby was up. It was Saturday. No school. But Bobby loved the early morning cartoon shows.

"I'll get the medallion from his room," Barry said.

Red Fox raised his hand. "No, I promised Bobby a talk yesterday. The least I can do is to try to explain why we must take away his prize."

The Mesquakie responded to the unspoken request he read in Carol's eyes. "I will be careful. I will not frighten him. I will explain it in a way that he will be able to understand."

Barry smiled grimly. "Please, Red Fox. Just the talk—no demonstrations. Bobby gets enough of that spooky stuff on television."

Twenty-One

The polished, knotty pine paneling behind Cal Hawkins's leather couch was festooned with western Americana from ceiling to floor. A magnificent buffalo head formed the hub of an incredibly diverse wheel of war bonnets, tomahawks, flintlock rifles, cap and ball revolvers, arrowheads, bullet molds, chuck-wagon pans, and artifacts far beyond that which Barry Jacobs's limited expertise on frontier America could possibly identify.

Cal leaned forward and gestured toward the coffee-pot on the low table between them. "Like some coffee?"

Barry sat uncomfortably on an easy chair fashioned of thick cushions, supported by enormous cattle horns. How the hell was he going to convince Cal Hawkins about the vicious reality of the *Chindi* without sounding like a raving loony?

Cal poured Barry a mug of very black coffee and set it on a heavy plate before his knees. Barry smiled his thanks, then leaned forward to add cream and sugar from the rugged pewter serving set.

Cal wore faded blue jeans and an old flannel shirt, frayed at both cuffs. He was obviously in his lounging attire, and he flopped easily against the leather couch.

Barry noticed that it was the first time that he had seen Cal's hands without the black leather gloves. They were understandably pale, and Barry could see some early liver splotches showing through the thin hair.

"What can I do for you?" Cal smiled, his eyebrows knitting into a slight frown.

"Two more Navajo pots came back last night," Barry told him, deciding not to waste any more time on the amenities.

Cal's eyes widened, and he started to open his mouth. But he reestablished control of himself and brought his eyelids back to a gunfighter's squint. "Has that Indian ever come messing around your place again?"

Barry nodded. "Don Red Fox was with Carol and me all night."

Cal lost his practiced indifference. "I thought I told you . . ."

Barry interrupted the man's unwelcome, presumptuous scolding. "I know whose pots they were."

Curious, Cal leaned back against the rich leather sofa. "Whose?"

"I didn't go to bed last night, so I read my morning newspaper early," Barry replied. "I took the liberty of bringing it along to share with you."

Cal scowled and took the paper from Barry.

"Check out page eight," Barry told him.

Cal made some show of it, as if the pages were six feet wide and extremely difficult to turn and smooth. Then he found page eight, and his attention was immediately grabbed by the large three-column picture and the blare headline: "Local Man Killed in Freak Owl Attack."

"Jeezus!" Cal whispered through clenched teeth. "That's old Ramon! Man, that's Beano's parking lot. How in God's great universe could such a thing happen in Beano's parking lot? I mean, how the hell

could such a crazy goddamn thing happen anywhere?"

Cal shook his head again and again as he skimmed the story. "This makes no goddamn sense," he said testily, as if his denial of the episode would force the morgue to release Ramon, laughing and smiling, admitting that it had all been a rather tasteless joke.

He set the newspaper beside him on the sofa, then made a pistol of his thumb and forefinger and pointed it at Barry. "You mean Ramon's pots came back to your yard?"

Barry nodded confirmation of the statement.

"Did that sonuvabitch of an Injun have them pots with him when he came a-callin' on you and the missus?"

"No," Barry answered. Then, frowning his anger and amazement, he asked Cal: "You surely do not believe that Red Fox could set those owls on Ramon."

Cal shrugged. "Some Indians can do unbelievable things with animals. It's like they speak the animal's language. Man has been training falcons to hunt for a couple of thousand years. Why couldn't a damn crazy Indian train a bunch of owls to attack somebody?"

Barry felt a kind of sick sweat dampen the hair along his forehead and temples.

"I saw the pots arrive," he said feebly.

Then, shaking his head against the unreality of what he had seen, he spoke louder: "I saw the pots come flying to my backyard on a swirling black wind. I heard flutes and drums, and I smelled death on the hoof, man."

Cal's mouth dropped open in wonder, and he gave a small snort of protest.

Barry forced himself to meet Cal's eyes with his own. "It's just like I said."

Cal snorted again, then shook his head wildly from side to side. "Hell, man, that Injun is working some weird Injun mumbo jumbo on you."

"My wife saw the pots arrive from the kitchen window." Barry stood his ground. If he weren't so damn afraid of what he had seen, he would have felt as though he were arguing the reality of the Easter Bunny or Santa Claus with Cal Hawkins.

"He's got you both shammied, that's all," Cal said. "Jeezus, don't fall for that Indian bullshit. That man is dangerous. Don't you see, he killed Gooch, now Ramon."

"Cal," Barry persisted. "Have you ever heard of a *Chindi*?"

Cal leaned back against the thick cushions of his sofa and hitched a boot across a knee. "The *Chindi* is kind of like an avenging angel among the Navajo. Some of the old Medicine men were supposed to be able to sing them into existence and set them against other folks."

Cal arched a questioning eyebrow. "Is that the crap Red Fox is feeding you? He's telling you we pissed off a *Chindi* when we dug up that mound?"

Before Barry could answer, Cal had already passed sentence: "God, Barry. He's really doing a number on you, man. These Indians are every bit as treacherous today as they were a hundred years ago."

Cal reached for the coffeepot. Barry saw that the man's hand was shaking.

"Jacobs, you've got to stop talking to that Mesquakie. I mean it, man, I think he's dangerous. I think he's a goddamn killer."

Barry pushed on with his next onslaught against Cal's stubborn hold on the rational world. "The spirit of the Medicine man who was in the burial mound spoke to Carol and me through Red Fox."

Cal shot to his feet as if he had leaned back against a branding iron. His knees caught the table as he came forward, and he nearly tipped the coffeepot and the serving set.

The tall man leaned over Barry, and his hands came swooping down as if he intended to seize him

by the throat. At the last instant the big hands dropped to his hips, and Cal stood glowering at Barry, his face reddened with anger.

"I should pitch you outa here on your head," Cal threatened. "Maybe that would knock some sense into you. Or maybe I should kick you in the ass. Maybe that's where your brains are!"

"I know how fantastic this must sound to you," Barry admitted.

"You *can't*, man, or you wouldn't be sitting here in my house saying it to me!"

"What is it, baby?" The two men swiveled their heads at the sound of the sleepy voice.

Kathy Miller leaned against the wall next to a doorway leading down a darkened hallway. Her face was puffy; her mouth was distorted by a wide yawn, but her basic sensuality shone through like a ray of sunlight on a cloudy day.

She had slipped a thin, nylon dressing gown over her shoulders on the basis of propriety, and she squeezed the sheer material together at her throat with a hand that was noticeably slim and graceful. A very shapely leg was casually exposed, and the dark outline of her nipples pressing against the gown told Barry that Kathy had worn nothing to bed.

"Sorry we woke you, doll baby," Cal apologized. Then, turning to direct an accusative scowl at Barry, he said: "Kathy works nights. This is still the middle of the night to her."

Barry found himself checking his watch as if he were duly noting the fact that the hour was too early to have awakened Kathy Miller. It was nine thirty. He wondered if Don Red Fox had seen Professor Fredericks yet.

Kathy smiled drowsily. "Oh, hi, Mr. Jacobs." The hand that was free came up to her face and wiggled its fingers in greeting.

Cal cursed softly under his breath as if invoking de-

monic attack upon Barry. "Don't start in on that shit with her!" Cal warned.

"What you talkin' about, Cal?" Kathy wanted to know, her curiosity aroused.

"I'm talking about how I am going to call the police right now before that homicidal Don Red Fox kills us all. In-clud-ing *you*, Jacobs!" Cal punctuated the tail of his sentence with jabs of a forefinger in front of Barry's nose.

"You can't believe that Red Fox killed Gooch and Ramon," Barry argued for reason.

"Oh, I certainly do *so* believe it," Cal nodded for emphasis.

"Ramon is dead?" Kathy asked for further explanation.

Cal scooped up the newspaper and walked it over to Kathy.

"You know how good redskins can be with animals and birds and things," he said to her. "It's damn supernatural what I've seen some Injuns do with animals. That goddamn Red Fox trained some desert owls as attack birds and set them on Ramon when he was leaving Beano's last night."

"And a couple of nights before that," Barry spoke up, "he got to Gooch's roosters and talked them into rebellion."

Kathy was trying to make sense of the conversation, and she was delighted when she could at last contribute. "Oh, now, Mr. Jacobs! Ed wouldn't let anyone near those ugly roosters of his. And the way he fought Don Red Fox, I know he wouldn't have let him come within five miles of his mean old birds."

"Just read the damn newspaper, and you'll understand my point!" Cal snapped.

Kathy frowned her annoyance at her lover's curt manner. "Okay, cowboy. Just hold your horses. I'm readin' it."

"You read it, babe, while I call the cops," Cal said firmly and with finality.

"And what are you going to tell them?" Barry wanted to know.

"I'm telling them that Don Red Fox has been killing people," Cal answered quickly. "You probably thought you were doing a damn noble thing coming here to warn us about a *Chindi*. Now I'm going to do you and your wife and kid a favor. I'm calling the cops and telling them to pick up that crazy red skin for questioning."

Barry stood up to block Cal's path to the telephone.

"Please listen to me," Barry said, despising the slight whine warping his voice. "There's nothing the police can do to help you. And Red Fox is not guilty of any murder. He's trying his damndest to save your lives!"

"You poor, dumb bastard," Cal shook his head. "Get out of my way before I knock you out of my way." The gunfighter's narrow eyes were cold on Barry's face.

The sound of the door chimes startled both men as they stood on the brink of violence.

Barry and Cal remained fixed, eyeing one another warily.

Kathy parted a window curtain and told them in a hushed voice that there was a police squad car out front.

Cal grinned, "For the first time in my life there's a cop around when I need him."

Kathy opened the door to admit a short, broad-waisted officer with a drooping moustache. Barry read the deputy sheriff patch on the officer's shoulder.

"Old Deputy Bill Rambo come right to my door to be of service," Cal laughed. "Barry, we're gonna ask the fattest deputy in the West to have some coffee with us, then we're gonna ask him to take out his little notebook, and we're gonna tell him a real story."

Barry felt heavy beads of sweat running down his

side. His stomach was feeling very queasy. He had come to warn Cal Hawkins and the other pothunters of the *Chindi*. Would his mission end with his betraying Don Red Fox to the police with false accusations?

"Kathy," Cal grinned expansively. "Fetch Bill some of that coffee cake. We'll put a few more pounds on that gut of his."

Deputy Rambo took off his hat and wiped his forehead with a sleeve. His bald head was glistening with sweat. It was obvious that the officer's day had started early and that he had already put in a lot of hours in the sun.

Rambo's face was as emotionless as if it had been carved by computer. In spite of their apparent friendship and Cal's good-natured chiding, the deputy gave no evidence of a sense of humor.

"Cal," Rambo spoke for the first time. "I got some bad news. I thought I should be the one to break it to you, 'fore you heard it on the television."

Rambo's voice was a low rumble, like thunder far off in the distance.

Cal's smile faded, and he pursed his lips before he shrugged and said, "Yeah, too bad about old Ramon. Terrible, ungodly way to go. But that's what Barry here and I want to talk to you about."

"I ain't here about Ramon."

Cal's eyes narrowed as he studied the round, pudgy features of the impassive lawman. Then an unspoken fear trembled his tall, erect frame, and he took a deep breath as if steeling himself for the worst.

"I come here about Sam and Merry."

"Oh, Jeezus, no!" Cal staggered backward and dropped heavily onto the leather sofa. Kathy came quickly to his side and put her arms around his shoulders.

"Some kids out target shooting early this morning saw their station wagon off a dirt road outside of Carefree. They saw the doors was open, and they saw what looked like legs stickin' out of one of the doors.

They hightailed it back to town and called the police."

Deputy Rambo delivered the horror simply and directly: "We found 'em both chewed all to hell, Cal. I never seen such in twenty-five years as a lawman. There was three dead coyotes around the wagon. Only thing we can figure out is that a bunch of coyotes attacked them while they was out spoonin'."

Cal was grim-faced. He felt himself fighting back tears.

"Figure the coyotes musta been rabid," Rambo added. "We sent the heads to the lab for analysis. Sam had a tire iron clutched in his hand. He put three of them away 'fore they got to him."

Barry wasn't proud of himself, but he chose Cal's weakness to follow through. "The *Chindi* can possess the body of any animal to fulfill its mission," he said.

Cal's eyes burned hatred as they looked at him. "Any human tracks around the wagon?" he asked Rambo.

"Nope. Just those of the kids about twenty, thirty feet away. We found evidence that the coyotes musta first jumped inside the wagon and attacked Sam and Merry. We figure Sam fought off the first ones, then more kept comin'."

"It ain't right," Cal said firmly as if decreeing it would change the fate of Sam and Merry. "And it ain't natural for coyotes to attack people, rabid or not."

Kathy was patting him gently.

"Do you think those coyotes could have been trained to attack people, Deputy?" Barry asked, pushing his advantage.

Deputy Rambo frowned, the first sign of emotion or thought Barry had observed in his expression since he had entered the house. "Can't train wild critters like coyotes to do anything. I mean, first you'd have to tame 'em. I mean, hell, that would take forever. That don't make no sense at all, mister."

"Just a theory," Barry said.

"Forget that one, mister," Rambo told him, holding a contemptuous frown as he realized that he was talking to a rank greenhorn to desert country.

Cal's fists came up to mash the tears from the corners of his eyes. Chaotic images flashed through his brain as he tried to remember if he had ever seen Joel McCrea or Randy Scott or Gary Cooper or any of the real-men heroes cry when they lost a good sidekick. He thought maybe John Wayne had come close a couple of times, but he had always got control of himself. Cal hoped that Rambo hadn't noticed the tears.

"I'm real sorry, Cal," Rambo went on. "I figured you'd want to hear it from me."

Bill Rambo was a good old boy. He knew about the code, and he followed it as best he could as a lawman.

"We bagged Sam and Merry in plastic. Remember them as they were, man, 'cause it'll be a closed-coffin funeral. They was done in real bad. Worst I've ever seen."

Cal gripped his knees until his knuckles stood out like white marbles. "Thanks for bringing me the news personal, Bill."

Deputy Rambo nodded. "What was that other thing you wanted to talk to me about with this fella?"

Cal's eyes locked into Barry's as if he were trying to pull the total truth of Don Red Fox, the *Chindi*, and the terrible deaths of his friends from his soul.

"That'll keep, Bill," Cal told him. "Barry and I got to talk things through some more before we sit down with you. We gotta lot of talking to do before we know just exactly what we want to tell you for sure. I ain't got it set in my own mind yet for certain, but I really got to listen to what Barry is trying to tell me."

Twenty-Two

"So you are the infamous Donald Red Fox, collector of the dead," Professor Carl Fredericks said around the long, thin stogie tucked against the inside of his cheek. He blew out a cloud of smoke as if punctuating his rhetorical question.

Don had had to wait until Fredericks had completed a student consultation. He knew he was lucky the professor was on campus on Saturday. The receptionist in the anthropology department had seemed to be giving him a stall, but Fredericks had at last appeared and invited him into his cluttered office. It was nearly ten o'clock. He wondered if Barry had had a chance to see Cal Hawkins.

"I hear that you are after our dry bones," Fredericks chuckled, his thick hands encircling his ample stomach as he leaned back in his desk chair.

"That's better than being after your fresh scalps," Don reminded him.

Stacks of students' papers rested along the windowsill, pressed down by pieces of Indian pottery. Books lined the office walls from floor to ceiling. There were boxes of artifacts piled on top of one another with a kind of studied carelessness.

"McCutcheon over at New Mexico wrote to me a

couple of weeks ago warning me to be on the lookout for you," Fredericks said, removing the cigar to pull a bit of tobacco from the edge of his tongue. "He said you got a bunch of Native American students there to join you in a protest. He also said you harassed a couple of local small museum owners."

"But very peacefully."

Fredericks nodded. "Very peacefully. But even then you were nearly arrested."

"By a couple of red-neck cops," Red Fox explained. "Luckily they had some college graduates on the force, and they understood the nature of our protest."

"Luckily," Fredericks frowned. "But don't try those tactics in Arizona."

"Because you have no college graduates on the police force?"

"We have fine law enforcement here, Red Fox, but the educational requirements of our police officers is not at question."

"No," Don admitted. "It is not."

"Look at you," Fredericks snorted. "Who are you trying to impress? The beaded amulet around your throat. The Medicine bag at your side. The shoulder-length hair. My God, man, where are the feathers in your hair?"

"I have followed the traditional ways all my life," Don said simply. He had no plans of permitting Fredericks to pressure him into becoming defensive.

"Went on the vision quest, too, I suppose."

"Yes."

"Learned the tribal dances. You Mesquakies even host an annual powwow out there in Iowa, don't you?"

Don nodded. He may as well let the man have his say.

"I suppose you live in a teepee and shit in the bushes?"

"My parents have a very comfortable midwestern

farm home. We have indoor plumbing, television, a telephone. Before her death my wife and I lived in a mobile home on my parents' farm."

"Well, now," Fredericks smiled in the manner of one who has won his point, "since you live in such modern surroundings, don't you feel something of a fool practicing a religion that has nothing to do with today?"

Don Red Fox had no moment of hesitation in supplying his answer. "I feel no more a fool than should one who follows the teachings of a carpenter from Nazareth who died two thousand years ago. That person can live in a modern home and can work in a modern office, yet would you criticize him for practicing a religion that has nothing to do with today?"

Fredericks arched an astonished eyebrow. "And you believe you can compare your Medicine ways with Christianity?"

"I believe that there is but one Great Spirit, but because of our cultural differences, we may understand him in various ways and receive the sacred transfer of his secret name in different symbols," Red Fox said softly. "I believe that all men are brothers, all women are sisters, and that all those who achieve an attitude of humility, a respect for all living things, a sense of harmony with their environment, a balance between the sacred and the material, may reach out and touch the Great Spirit and receive his strength."

Fredericks cleared his throat noisily. "But you didn't come here to discuss comparative religions."

"No, I came here to ask you to return the bones of the grandfather you removed from Barry Jacobs's backyard." Don reached into the pouch at his side and removed an envelope.

"I have here a letter from Mr. Jacobs requesting that you surrender the skeletal remains to me at once," Don said, stretching across the desk to hand Fredericks the formal request that Barry had written

that morning before they had separated to perform their individual missions.

Fredericks set the envelope down unopened. "I told Mr. Jacobs that I would consider your request *after* I finished my examination."

"Consider your research concluded," Red Fox told him. "Read the letter."

Fredericks clamped his jaws down on the stogie and took several furious puffs in rapid succession. "Damn it, Red Fox, do you really think you can go around looting every museum in the United States?"

"I have no interest in looting your museums, Professor."

"Yes you do!" Fredericks growled, the tip of his cigar glowing as fiery red as his temper. "You're on some insane mission of approaching all the museums to ask for the return of all Indian skeletons, all Indian artifacts, all Indian . . ."

"Only the skeletal remains," Don corrected him. "I have no more interest in the arrowheads, pottery, and beads than did the Indians who were buried with them. We have no concept of creating our own museums, Professor. We wish only to rebury the skeletal remains languishing in your Anglo museums and to provide them with sacred interment on consecrated ground."

"You activists must stay up all night thinking of these nutty ideas," Fredericks accused him.

"I'm not an activist. I am one who wishes to see the remains of the Native American people treated with respect."

Fredericks took a last drag on his cigar, then ground it out in an ashtray fashioned from a buffalo horn. "Can't you understand that we anthropologists are trying to preserve the history of the red man on this continent? Hell, it's just another burden for the goddamn white man. I mean, how the hell many Indians have the education—or even the interest—to study their past? Until you give a shit about your own his-

tory, guys like me will have to do it for you."

"I am certain we appreciate all that you are doing for us," Red Fox sighed. "I just want those bones for sacred reburial."

Fredericks shifted his bulk in the desk chair. "No, Red Fox, I'm not buying your sanctimony. Especially when you use that sanctimony to obstruct learning."

Fredericks glanced at his watch. "I've got a luncheon meeting to prepare for, but I want you to leave with this little history lesson reverberating in your skull. I believe that any shred of religious thought that you or any other Indian might refer to as his traditional belief was adapted from the white man."

Red Fox frowned his incredulity. "I thought you were a scholar of the Native American people."

"I am," Fredericks said smugly. He turned in his desk chair and plucked two books from the shelves behind him. "Here are my two textbooks on Native Americans to *prove* that I am an expert."

"And in those books you say that the Indian had no religious beliefs before the European invasion?"

Fredericks smiled as though a slow learner was beginning to catch on to a basic truth.

"The Indian is a notorious borrower," he said with all the confidence of his doctorate of philosophy and his years behind the academic lectern. "At the time of the white man's advent to this continent, the Indian was little more than an animal. He was totally incapable of abstract thought."

Red Fox shook his head. "I can't believe I'm hearing this from an educated man."

Fredericks seemed to take delight in Red Fox's perturbation. "After so many years of the early missionaries pounding stories of Christianity and Old Testament heroes into their heads, the primitive, animalistic Indians finally caught on, called God the Great Spirit, and tried to say that they had always believed in such a supreme being."

"Hey, man," Don proclaimed. "You're a red-neck with a Ph.D."

Fredericks laughed. "All the early Indians were interested in was physical survival, not spirituality. Every bit of religious philosophy you can turn up can be traced back to the early Christian missionaries."

"Professor, the earliest journals written by white men on this continent will tell you that the Native Americans believed in a Supreme Being long before the European set his plow in the ground or his church steeples in the air," Don said calmly, dismissing the man's ill-concealed bigotry. "But as we have already established, I did not come here to discuss religion. I want those bones."

"No chance." Fredericks's voice had the angry buzz of a rattlesnake's tail. "I told Jacobs that I would consider your request after I completed my study. He gave them to me for my examination."

"Technically, by your goddamn white law, those bones are his," Red Fox argued. "He wants them back. Read the letter."

"After my examination, Red Fox. And that may take me years. I'm a very busy man, you know."

"If you do not return those skeletal remains, Professor Fredericks, you will be a very dead man."

Fredericks wore the kind of triumphant smile that he had been seen to bare when he had successfully entrapped a student bold enough to question his classroom theorizations. "I do believe that you just threatened me. I suppose that I will have to call the campus police and have your red ass thrown out of here."

Red Fox could not control the sneer that twisted his lips. "I would not touch a hair of your chinny-chin—to borrow a line from an Anglo folk tale. Professor, in your vast and in-depth studies, did you ever hear of a *Chindi*?"

Fredericks laughed heartily. "Oh, my God! Now

we really see Native American theology at its finest. The avenging angel of the Navajos! God, spare me!"

"That's why I came here, Professor. Surrender the bones, and you will be spared."

Fredericks blinked at Red Fox as though the man had suddenly produced a tomahawk and scalping knife.

"You're serious," the professor blinked again in astonishment. "You're really serious about this. You must be insane. Dangerously insane."

"Three nights ago Ed Gooch was slashed to death by his own roosters," Don said. "Last night Ramon Quintana was sliced up by desert owls. Sam and Merry Henderson have been missing for two nights. All those people took part in the dig on Jacobs's property."

"Desert owls and roosters, my ass!" Fredericks snorted. "You probably murdered them on some bloody midnight raid. You know, you people really haven't changed. You're still little more than animals."

Fredericks was sweating as profusely as if he had been digging a ditch in the merciless Arizona sun. "I want you out of this office, Red Fox. I want you out pronto, or I'm calling campus security."

"I can't leave without the skeleton of Moon Bear," Don said. "That's the bottom line."

"Moon Bear?" Fredericks arched a questioning eyebrow. "The bones have a name now?"

"The spirit of the grandfather spoke through me and told Barry and Carol Jacobs its name," Red Fox explained matter-of-factly.

Fredericks was suddenly academically curious. "This is remarkable. By your own authority you appoint yourself to gather all the skeletal remains in all the museums across the country, then you invent ghost stories in the hopes of scaring people into complying with your wishes. But when your primitive spook tales don't work, you are willing to commit

murder to get those goddamn bones returned to you."

"I have killed no one," Red Fox said with firm assurance. "I have never killed anyone in my entire life."

Fredericks shrugged, becoming more intrigued by the man in his office. "Maybe you bring out the scalping knife, maybe you don't. You're no dumb ass, though, I'll have to give you that. It took a little research to come up with Moon Bear."

Red Fox frowned. It was his turn to be confused. "I don't understand."

Fredericks emptied his ashtray in a wastebasket that was already spilling over on the floor. "Hey, come on. I know you redskins love to con the white eyes, but remember to whom you are speaking. Remember the goddamn books on the desk in front of you. I'm the expert."

Red Fox nodded. "So tell me, expert, who was Moon Bear?"

Fredericks emitted another of his snorting bursts of laughter. "Okay, I'll play your silly game for a while. Moon Bear was one of the right-hand men of Wovoka, the Paiute Messiah. Scholars still hotly debate the issue, but some say that it was Moon Bear who brought the Sioux the botched-up interpretation of the Ghost Dance that set the massacre at Wounded Knee in motion."

Red Fox sat expectantly, waiting for more. Fredericks scowled his impatience with the Indian.

"So you saw the Ghost Shirt on the bones, and you decided to come up with the tall tale about your talking to Moon Bear's spirit and the bones belonging to him," Fredericks said as though he were the private detective unraveling the solution to the mystery in the final reel of a late movie on television.

"I had never heard of Moon Bear until this morning," Red Fox said, doubting whether he would be believed. "I did not know he was an historical figure until this moment."

Fredericks scowled in an exaggerated expression of disbelief.

"Open Jacobs's letter, Fredericks," Red Fox demanded. "The man is ordering you to return the skeleton to him in care of me—right now!"

"Possession is nine tenths of the law, red man, especially when it comes to artifacts found in a dig within the city limits," Fredericks smiled confidently. "Maybe if you are a good Little Beaver and keep out of trouble, I'll give you the bones when I complete my thorough examination."

"You had better give them back while you can, Professor Fredericks," Red Fox warned.

Fredericks's face became red with the anger that had been smoldering ever since the Mesquakie had entered his office. He rose from the desk, stretched himself to his full height, and inhaled deeply, as if to puff out his already considerable bulk to even more formidable proportions.

"Red Fox," he shouted, wagging a fist at him across the cluttered desk, "I am sorely tired of your intimidation tactics. I want your ass out of here right now, or I am truly going to call the campus cops. And I would be the last one to grieve if they just accidentally happened to break both of your arms when they escorted you out of here."

Fredericks slammed a beefy hand over the white telephone on his desk.

Red Fox sighed, got slowly to his feet. "Whatever you say, *Kemosabe*."

The unctuous smile returned to Fredericks's lips. "That's a good little Indian boy."

"I wonder if you are expert enough on Native American traditions to know how to draw a sacred circle if the *Chindi* shows up after those bones tonight?" Red Fox turned to ask him as he was opening the door to leave the professor's office.

"I'm expert enough on American Indian traditions to know how to separate the bullshit from the truth,"

Fredericks laughed contemptuously. "And believe me, there's been little truth in anything that I've ever heard from an Indian."

"Well, you heard the truth from me this morning, Fredericks," Red Fox told him.

"Oh, really?" Fredericks shrugged his thick shoulders. "Go ahead and con those greenhorns for a few bucks and groceries if you want, Red Fox," he rumbled his threat from deep within his large chest. "But if I see your face around my office or this campus again, I'll telephone the police and suggest they book you on suspicion of murder. I'm probably making a mistake by not picking up that telephone right now."

Red Fox lifted his palm in the traditional sign of peace. "The mistake you are making is that you are not giving me the skeleton of Moon Bear."

Twenty-Three

"There's no way I'm going to be alone here with Bobby after dark," Carol said into the receiver.

"There's no way that I would leave you there alone," Barry agreed. He was standing in a telephone booth outside the Manhattan West disco. Don Red Fox waited for him in the Oldsmobile. He had the windows rolled down against the high-noon heat.

"Don struck out with Professor Fredericks, but I managed to convince Cal of the seriousness and the reality of the *Chindi*," Barry told her. "Regretfully I had some terrible news to add weight to my argument. A deputy arrived with word that they had found the remains of Sam and Merry Henderson."

"Don't tell me about it!" Carol interrupted the report. "I don't want to hear the gory way they were killed."

"I understand," Barry said, checking his response. "I'm going to get us a room in a motel until we get this thing settled."

"Good, Barry," Carol sighed her gratitude. "Thank God. Thank you. I couldn't take another night here with that. . . ."

Barry waited only a few seconds to hear if Carol would fill in her descriptive pause, then he continued

with his comments. "I'll be by in a couple of hours to pick up you and Bobby and get you checked in. I told Don that I thought we should get right back to Fredericks and *steal* those damn bones if we have to! I figure the bones are the most important thing to the *Chindi*, and we won't get things settled until that skeleton is back in the mound."

"Why won't Fredericks honor the letter you wrote?" Carol wanted to know. She was leaning on the counter in the kitchen telephone nook, furiously doodling while she spoke to her husband. She was startled to see that she had been drawing arrows and knives.

"From the way that Don described him, Fredericks behaved like an arrogant ass during their confrontation," Barry answered her. "Look, hon, it must be a hundred degrees in this damn telephone booth, and Don will soon be baked alive in the Cutlass."

Carol felt a strange panic when she realized that her husband was making peremptory sounds of hanging up. "Where are you going now?"

"Don has insisted that we go see David Little Turtle, a Navajo-Anglo artist, who has followed the old traditions and knows how to combat such things as *Chindis*."

"David Little Turtle," Carol marveled. "I know his work. He's very well known."

Carol was into art, Barry knew. He had never heard of the man before Don had mentioned him.

"Yeah, well, I hope he knows enough about *Chindis* to help us out," Barry said almost prayerfully. "I hope to God he knows enough to put that thing to rest."

"Be home before dark!" Carol did not say it as a request. It was a desperate plea.

"Don't worry, Carol," Barry reassured her. "I'll call you so you can be ready."

Carol cradled the receiver after their mumbled good-byes. She pushed back the chair by the tele-

phone and walked to the kitchen window that looked out over the backyard. The pots atop the burial mound seemed like roosting hens hunkered down over their nest of soil. How free of all menace the mound seemed when it was being sterilized in the incredible brightness of an Arizona noon.

Carol wished there was some way in which she could restructure the hideous fantasy in which they now found themselves playing real-life roles. It was all so far removed from normal experience.

Who would believe that an ancient horror came to life in their backyard when the sun went down? It was all like some weird monster movie. But this monster had leaped from the movie screen and had materialized into their lives. What is more, this unbelievable monster could actually kill them!

Carol knew that Barry had always believed her to be a really hard-nosed, realistic, and determinedly liberated, modern woman. She had carefully cultivated such an image in order to survive successfully in the world of real-estate sales.

Deep inside her secret self, where she seldom let anyone peek for even a moment, she was a shy, insecure little girl who was frightened by long shadows on the wall and strange, unidentifiable sounds from a darkened closet.

As a young girl she had been fascinated by motion pictures of werewolves cursed by the full moon, mummies that walked from their violated tombs, dinosaurs activated and made unimpregnable by radiation—and especially Dracula, the sinister, yet somehow alluring, vampire. She used to lie on her bed at night, baring her throat in the moonlight, trying desperately to lure Dracula to her jugular vein so that he might bestow upon her the bite of immortality. But then she would suddenly be terrified that he might really appear in a swirling vortex of moonbeams, and she would place lipstick crosses across her throat and her

wrists and fall asleep with an open Bible on her chest.

Carol always believed that she had good reason to accept the supernatural as part of the greater reality. When she was a girl of thirteen and staying on her grandparents' farm outside of Waterloo, Iowa, she had seen a ghost. Oh, everyone—Grandma, Grandpa, Mom, and Dad—had tried to talk her out of it, but she knew what she had seen. And she knew that deep down her family realized that she was telling the truth.

She had been getting ready for bed and was brushing her teeth in the upstairs bathroom of the well-kept farmhouse that was the Lundquist family place. It had given her a sense of the ongoing continuity of things to realize that her father, whom everyone recognized as a dynamic businessman in St. Paul, had grown up as an Iowa farmboy. And now she was staying for a week with Grandma and Grandpa Lundquist, her own father's parents, and probably leaning over the same sink into which her father had spat out toothpaste nearly thirty years before.

She left the bathroom and was walking down the narrow hallway to her room when she noticed that a door that she had never before seen open was standing ajar. Curious, she looked inside and was astonished to see a young girl about her age seated in front of the large mirror of a dressing table, vigorously brushing her hair.

Carol's mouth gaped in bewilderment. To her knowledge she was alone in the house with Grandma and Grandpa Lundquist.

The other teen-ager seemed fully content on doing her hair, and she appeared unaware that she was being watched, but Carol could see her clearly.

The girl had straw-blond hair, the same color as her own. Her fair complexion was sunburned. Her large eyes were green, the same as Carol's. In fact,

Carol puzzled, the girl looked very much like her in many ways.

Then the girl before the dressing table seemed to grow aware of the one who was watching her with such astonished attention. For one fleeting moment their eyes met in the reflection of the mirror. The girl's mouth formed a sudden circle of surprise, then she smiled, and seemed about to open her lips to speak to Carol. Instead she instantly and totally vanished.

Carol had run screaming down the steps, shouting that she had seen a ghost.

Grandma and Grandpa Lundquist had then behaved in a very peculiar manner. Those two sweet, laughing, plump souls—whom she for years had seen only at Christmas and other holidays and had considered generous representatives of Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny—had actually scolded her. And when Carol had persisted in providing them with a description of the ghost, they had grown almost angry with her.

They had reached an impasse, she and her grandparents, but Carol absolutely refused to sleep alone upstairs. She bunked for the remainder of her visit on the large sofa in the front room, just a few feet away from the door of Grandma and Grandpa Lundquist's own bedroom.

Before Mom and Dad had driven down from St. Paul to retrieve her at the end of the week, she had solved the mystery of the ghost. In an old family scrapbook, there were several photographs of the teen-aged ghost, from babyhood to crinolines. The ghost was her father's sister, April, who had been killed in an automobile accident when she was seventeen.

Carol would never forget the magic of that ever-so-transient moment when she had made eye contact with the ghost of her Aunt April, a girl who had died ten years before she had been born. Nothing her

grandparents or her parents could say could convince her otherwise. For a long time Carol had considered that April may have become her guardian angel or spirit.

But whatever capacity the soul of her aunt might serve in whatever dimension of reality, Carol had had her personal horizons enormously expanded on that summer night of her thirteenth year.

That was why, she mused as she again regarded the burial mound in the backyard, the concept of the *Chindi*, an avenging spirit, did not shatter her personal constructs of reality. But the notion of something supernatural that might do her or her family terrible harm completely terrified her.

She poured herself another cup of coffee and clucked her tongue at the trembling hand that held the pot. She had not slept a moment, and with the image of that black, swirling wind forever etched into her memory cells, she did not know when she would ever sleep peacefully again.

The ghost of Aunt April had seemed reassuring, her own personal proof of survival of the human soul.

The image of the *Chindi*, boiling wind like a berserk tornado, assuming the bodies of animals and owls to kill and horribly mutilate those who had violated its domain, seemed threatening, a suggestion that a soul might be damned or tormented.

The hot coffee stung her lower lip, and she held the cup under the cold-water faucet.

"That's a laugh," she said aloud to herself. "To get cold water from the tap in Arizona, I would have to let the water run from now to Christmas."

But even the tepid water was able to make the coffee more acceptable, less scalding. Carol took a deep swallow, mentally urging the caffeine to thunder through her nervous system and provide her with at least simulated alertness.

Maybe the violation of the *Chindi* was a direct

curse against her for all her past sins, culminating with her taking Barry away from Elizabeth and his kids.

"I think it's disgusting the way you broke up a good, solid marriage," Helen Byers, one of the secretaries at the real-estate agency had told her when the gossip about their affair had become common knowledge among their co-workers.

"No 'other woman' can break up a marriage," she had told Helen. "If a marriage is strong, it can resist any attempted invasion. A marriage already has to be weak or broken before a third party can jeopardize it."

Carol thought about it. It seemed like a good answer then. It still seemed like a good answer. She hadn't stolen Barry away from Elizabeth. Elizabeth had already lost him when Carol and Barry had met.

Then maybe it was the way she behaved with Billy Bob, her ex-husband. Maybe those were the sins for which she was about to atone at the claws of the *Chindi*.

She had been a sophomore majoring in business at the University of Minnesota when she stopped with some friends for some espresso at a popular coffee-house. It was 1967, she was nearly twenty, and like most of her generation, she was a closet hippie, a weekend flower child.

They had sat around the big, rough, round table to plan an antiwar demonstration, but they ended up listening to the big, coarse folk singer rasping his bittersweet songs of establishment betrayal and unrequited love. That was her introduction to Billy Bob.

He had noticed her straw-blond hair, and he claimed to have composed a song on the spot as a tribute to her beauty and her blondness.

Later Carol heard the same carefully rehearsed lyrics dedicated as spontaneous hymns to the beauty of other girls, and the awareness of Billy Bob's infidelities had torn bloody chunks away from her heart.

For reasons which were admittedly unclear to her and totally opaque to her parents, she married Billy Bob, the wayfaring minstrel.

The good—the only good—from their union was Bobby.

The bad was too long to itemize, but included life with a man who did not seem to be able to live without an endless series of chemical highs and physical lows. It was during the lows that he often beat Carol and threatened her life.

“But through the worst times he gave me, I never went out with another man,” Carol told her sympathetic mother when she announced her intentions of obtaining a divorce. “I never screwed up my life with pot, LSD, booze, or cocaine the way he did. I stayed home and read to Bobby and took good care of him.”

Her mother had agreed that Carol had retained the morality and the sense of purpose which she and her father had so diligently sought to instill within her.

“And by God, I *did* keep my morals and my good sense,” Carol now said aloud to her empty house. “Well, my morals, anyway. I don’t suppose I gave evidence of much good sense when I married that creep. But, damn it, I haven’t done anything to be punished for.”

Carol ran nervous fingers through blond hair tousled from tension and lack of sleep and the absence of a comb.

“Then, why me, God?” she whined childishly. “Why do I have to be the one who has that monster in my backyard?”

Carol was startled from her confrontation with the ontological question she had posed. She wheeled, upsetting her coffee, unable to identify the sound that had intruded upon her reverie.

“Hey, Mom!”

It was Bobby home from playing with friends. He had slammed the front door again.

"Don't slam that front door!" she corrected in a hoarse shout.

Bobby gave no sign that the admonition would stunt either his growth or his natural inclination to be heard by his mother from the very first moment he set foot in the house.

"Mom," he told her, "there's a couple of guys waiting for me out front. Can I bring 'em some cookies?"

"Who are the guys?" Carol wanted to know.

"Tim and Tom Barrens from down the street."

"Are they twins, Tim and Tom?"

"No," Bobby explained somewhat impatiently. "Tim is in my grade at school. Tom is his big brother. He's gonna be fourteen."

Carol smiled and nudged the cookie jar to the edge of the counter. "Wash your hands first. And remember, don't make it an exclusive at our house. Hit those guys' mom for cookies once in a while, too."

"Sure," Bobby agreed. He stood on his tiptoes, screwed on the hot water, wiggled his fingers under the tap as if it were issuing acid.

"Better than that," Carol scowled. "And use soap."

"The water's too hot," Bobby complained.

"Then the hands are going to be too dirty to eat cookies."

Carol had come up with the winning line in the current mother-son debate.

"Oh, Bobby," Carol remembered as he was loading three napkins with four cookies apiece. "Don't go far from the house. Barry will be by soon, and we'll be going to a motel tonight."

Bobby's voice squeaked as it echoed his mother's announcement. "A motel?" he shook his head in bewilderment. "Why are we going to stay in a motel? We just moved in to our house."

"The carpenters are coming to do some more work," Carol lied with the skill of mothers everywhere when they are convinced they know something

their children should not. "We'll be back as soon as they finish."

Bobby shrugged, no longer interested. The ways of adults were truly unworthy of prolonged speculation.

He left through the front door, closing it quietly behind him. Now that his presence had been duly noted by his mother, there was no longer any need to slam the door. His friends were eagerly awaiting the promised snack.

"Your mom makes good cookies," Tim said politely, half through the first sweet.

"Sure does," Tom agreed, minding the manners drummed into him by socially conscious parents.

"She bought 'em at Smitty's supermarket," Bobby said simply.

Tom nodded, moving a second cookie into place. "Smitty's has a good bakery, all right."

"Wish you'd got some lemonade," Tim said, swallowing hard. "It's so hot and I'm so thirsty, I can barely chew."

Bobby considered bracing his mother for some Kool-Aid, but he thought better of it. "There's a hose in the backyard. We can drink from that."

Tom laughed. "Boy, you can tell you just moved from the Midwest. Maybe you can drink from a hose in Minnesota in September, but out here the water from a garden hose will be hot enough to boil an egg."

"Better'n nothing," Bobby told them.

Tim wrinkled his nose. "We'll let it run for a little bit. Then it won't be too bad."

"So where's this Indian burial mound?" Tom pressed Bobby. "I gotta be going on my paper route."

"It's in the backyard, too," Bobby said. "C'mon through the gate."

"How's your pool?" Tom asked as he and his brother followed their host into the backyard.

"Only been in it once," Bobby explained. "It's brand new. I think it's neat."

"You don't have a diving board," Tim noticed.

Bobby sighed. "They think I'll hurt myself. I have to wait until I'm older."

"Jeez, man," Tim commiserated. "Do they think you're a baby?"

Bobby ignored the question, even though it was asked in support of his position. "Here's the burial mound," he pointed to the opened grave. "And there's some of the things that were in it."

"Neato!" Tim exclaimed.

"Really!" Tom agreed. "And there's the medallion you were telling Tim about." He knelt beside the collection of artifacts. "Can I handle it?"

"I guess so," Bobby shrugged. "I just can't take it back in the house."

Tim crinkled his nose in puzzlement. "Why are you going to leave all this neat Indian stuff out here?"

Bobby felt a strange warmth moving over him. He guessed he was too embarrassed to explain.

"God," Tom gulped the last of his cookie allotment. "I'll take the stuff if you and your folks don't want it."

Bobby's eyes widened. "No, no, you can't take it!"

"Jeez, man, cool your jets!" Tom's feelings were hurt. "I'm no thief. But if all you're gonna do is leave it outside to get ruined . . ."

"There's a ghost after it," Bobby said in a rush of words, getting it out quickly and having done with it. "There's an Indian ghost after it, and the ghost will kill anybody who takes anything."

Tim and Tom looked first at Bobby, then at each other, then back at Bobby. Tom was the first to laugh.

"Hey, Minnesota Kid, you are something else!" Tom snickered his fourteen-year-old's sophisticated contempt toward evidence of primitive unenlightenment. "Where did you get that junk about ghosts?"

Bobby wished he were inside watching *Wallace and Ladmo* on channel five. He wished that he could

have his words about the burial mound and the medallion officially erased for all time from the memories of Tim and Tom Barrens.

Tom stiffened his legs, crumpled one arm to his chest, dangled the other arm before him, and walked around the mound in short, jerking steps. "The mummy walks," he mocked Bobby.

"Aaaah!" Tim gurgled in mock horror as his brother put the dangling hand to his throat to pantomime strangulation. "The mummy's got me!"

Bobby knew he was too big to cry, but the eye-stinging urge crossed his mind.

Their impromptu mummy skit completed, the Barrens brothers turned their full attention back to Bobby. They had now become missionaries of reason.

"Hey, man, there are no ghosts," Tom argued.

"Just in movies and television," Tim promised.

Tom picked up the beaded medallion for a closer inspection. "Hey, Bobby! You'd get an 'A' if you brought this to Mrs. Connelly's class."

"What do you mean?"

"You and Tim both have Mrs. Connelly, right?" Tom knew the answer, so he didn't wait to hear it. "Each year she has a project on Indians in Arizona. Man, you'd get an 'A' for sure with this medallion."

Bobby toed the dirt with his tennis shoe. "You guys don't understand. Red Fox, he's a Medicine man, and he told me about the Indian ghost. Well, it's not really a ghost, it's more like. . . ."

"Indian bullshit!" Tom snorted. "Hey, man, you live in Arizona now. You're gonna hear a lot of Indian superstitions out here. You can't go around believing that crap."

"Red Fox is a neat guy, Tom," Bobby pleaded for a more complete hearing of his testimony. "He told me how this thing—I forget its name—is angry about the men digging open the grave and how it is trying to get everything back. That's why I had to put the medallion back so it wouldn't hurt me by accident."

Tom laughed again and put his arm around Bobby's shoulders. "It is clear to me now, Bobby. That Indian is trying to con your old man and old lady out of these pots and things. I mean, some of these old things are valuable. I hope your parents don't fall for this bullshit."

Tim grinned up at his brother. "Didn't I tell you Tom was smart? Tom gets straight 'A' on his report card. Dad says he's gonna be a lawyer."

Tom took only a moment to bask in his younger brother's praise, then he pushed on, more zealously than before.

"Come on, you stinkin' Indian ghost!" the teenager challenged, raising the medallion high above his head. "If you are so tough, I dare you to come and get me right now!"

Tom stood quietly for a moment, as if inviting response from the netherworld. "Satisfied?" he asked Bobby after a silent count of ten had passed. "There's no ghost."

"It can't come out until after dark," Bobby explained, his feeble voice barely distinguishable.

Both Tim and Tom met that declaration with noisy hoots of amused derision. "You really are too much, man," Tom shook his head. He wrinkled his nose and lips in exaggerated disgust. "Tim, baby, I don't think I want you hangin' around with this simpleminded chickenshit."

Anxiety tore at Bobby's stomach with sharp claws. Two weeks of school had gone by, and Tim was the first boy or girl who had displayed any demonstrable evidence of friendliness to the new immigrant.

"C'mon, Tim," Tom shook his head contemptuously. "You've got better things to do than hang around with morons."

"Wait!" Bobby's plea burst from his lips. "I'm not a moron."

"You are if you believe that story about an Indian

ghost coming to get your ass if you take back that medallion," Tom accused him.

"Yeah, man," Tim followed his brother's lead. "That kinda stuff is dumb to believe in. Ghosts and monsters are only in the movies and on television."

"You gonna take back the medallion?" Tom asked, holding it gingerly between thumb and forefinger in front of Bobby's nose.

Bobby nodded, reached up, and took the beaded artifact into his own hands.

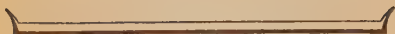
"I'm proud of you, Bobby," Tom smiled triumphantly. "One giant step for mankind, baby. Don't fall for any more of that superstitious crap."

Bobby shook his head. Tim and Tom were pleased with him. His forefinger traced the design worked into the beads so long ago.

He would hide the medallion in a secret place. No one would know that he had reclaimed his prize.

Bobby bet that Tom was right. Red Fox had just made up that spooky story so that he could get the medallion and all the other things for himself.

Twenty-Four



Barry and Don arrived at David Little Turtle's a few minutes after two. They had stopped at a Jack-in-the-Box for sandwiches and cold soft drinks, avoiding the noontime delay at one of the crowded restaurants in downtown Scottsdale. Little Turtle lived in a fashionable home on Jack Rabbit Road, not at all the hogan that Barry was expecting.

Nor was the physical appearance of the artist a convenient fit into the stereotype of the traditional practitioner of Navajo Medicine that Barry had been fashioning in his mind. The shoulder-length, gray-streaked hair pressed at the forehead with a beaded headband was Navajo. The beard and the rounded stomach was Falstaff.

"Would either of you gentlemen like a beer?" David asked graciously. "Or would you prefer wine?"

The wrist of the hand that had shaken theirs in greeting was bound with a heavy turquoise and silver bracelet. An impressively wrought turquoise-studded silver breastplate covered the upper half of David Little Turtle's ample chest.

"None for me, thanks," Red Fox answered.

David smiled in understanding. "Just as well if you're really treading the straight Medicine road." The artist tugged at his beard. "But I might as well let the Anglo in me be good for something and enjoy some good white Rhine wine."

"I'll have a beer," Barry said.

The front room of Little Turtle's home was a veritable art gallery of paintings, which Barry assumed were the work of their host. The canvases were colorful renderings of what appeared to be traditional Navajo symbols blended with the influence of German and French modernists.

Little Turtle was a man in his mid-fifties, a bit below six feet tall, but well over the two-hundred-pound mark. He paused on his way to the refrigerator to light a long black cigarillo. Barry could see from three overflowing ashtrays scattered about the room that the artist must chain-smoke the little cigars.

"Have a seat anywhere in there," he told Barry and Don. "Red Fox, what will you drink?"

"Apple juice, grape juice, ice water . . ."

"Ice water you got," Little Turtle pronounced. "I don't want to have you worrying about whether or not the juice might be fermented."

The artist laughed as he scooped ice cubes out of the freezer and slammed them into a glass. "I apologize, Red Fox. I admire your rigid traditionalism, actually."

Barry heard a beer can pop, and within a few moments Little Turtle returned to the front room bearing a tray with glasses of beer, wine, and water.

"I hope you've eaten," David said. "My old lady is out shopping with three of our daughters, and I'm too lazy to fix more than drinks."

"We had two hamburgers apiece," Red Fox said. "Hamburgers are one of my dietary concessions to the twentieth century."

Little Turtle laughed again, a hearty rumble from deep within the large stomach. "That's one instance

where you should remain steadfastly traditional. Or did you run out of pemmican and jerky?"

Red Fox smiled. "Long ago. It is easy to maintain a Medicine diet on the settlement back in Iowa, but on the road I often have to eat under the golden arches of McDonald's."

"The way west is probably more hazardous now than it was a hundred years ago," Little Turtle observed. "The game was plentiful, and the trails were safe—if you stayed out of the way of the trigger-happy pilgrims in the wagon trains. You camped under the stars and breathed clean air. Today you grind it out on the freeways, sleep in a Holiday Inn, and eat at McDonald's."

Little Turtle roared heartily at his capsule travelogue. "Help yourselves to smokes, gentlemen," he waved a hand toward a pack of thin black cigars on a coffee table. "I imagine Don only smokes herbal tobacco during ritual Medicine smokes."

Red Fox nodded. "That is true. I do not smoke for pleasure, only for medicine."

Little Turtle sighed noisily. "I feel so inferior before all your piety, Don Red Fox. How is it you have come to me? How might I possibly serve you?"

"I have heard it said that you know all there is to know about the *Chindi*," Don answered without any further observances of the social amenities.

"I know of the *Chindi*," Little Turtle admitted. "No one knows *all* there is to know of such a thing."

"I've got one in my backyard," Barry entered the conversation with his direct declaration.

Little Turtle took a deep drag on his little cigar. "The hell you say," he exhaled with the black smoke.

"It's raising hell!" Barry told him. "It has killed four people, and we're having a hell of a time warning the others who violated the burial mound. I think I convinced one of the men, but we've got three to go."

Little Turtle combed anxious fingers through his

wispy beard. "The *Chindi* is nothing to mess with. What do either of you know about it?"

Red Fox spoke up. "We know it can possess any animal to work its revenge. We have seen it in the form of a black dust devil returning artifacts to the burial mound."

"This burial mound is in your backyard, Barry?" the artist asked, wanting to get the facts straight.

Barry nodded. "Workmen sliced into it slightly when they were digging our pool. Then one of the laborers brought some pothunters to open the mound completely and to remove the pots and things inside. One of the pothunters took the skull. He was the first to die. Maybe you saw the stories in the newspaper about Ed Gooch and Ramon Quintana. Ramon was killed by desert owls in Beano's parking lot last night. Gooch had his throat slit by one of his own fighting roosters about three nights ago."

Little Turtle ground out a cigar and reached for the pack to get a fresh one. "I saw both of the stories. Thought they were both damned strange. But you said four deaths."

"They just found the bodies of a man and his wife this morning," Barry said. "They had disappeared a couple of nights ago. The official explanation for their deaths is rabid coyotes."

Little Turtle touched a wooden match to the cigarrillo and sucked in the flame. He caught Red Fox looking at him disapprovingly.

"Come on, Don," the artist chuckled. "I can't help it if I have all these bad habits. It's the Anglo blood in me."

Little Turtle reached up to tug again at his beard. "See? I wear these chin whiskers as silent tribute to the missionary who came to spread the gospel and ended up spreading my mother's legs. I can't remember my daddy at all. He left the reservation before I was two years old. But I heard from the old grandfathers that he wasn't a bad man. I guess he wasn't

even a bad minister. He just got carried away while sowing the seeds of Jesus and sowed a few seeds of his own."

"I am sorry you misinterpreted my seriousness of purpose as disapproval of your life-style, David," Red Fox told him. "I am only filled with worry because tonight someone else is bound to die by the *Chindi*."

Little Turtle pursed his lips, permitting a thin stream of smoke to escape while he sat silently. "Yes," he said after his brief reverie. "That is true. If there are those who still possess artifacts from the violated grave, they will die."

"Can you help us?" Red Fox asked.

"What do you want of me?" Little Turtle responded after he had considered the question.

"Can you teach me the chant which will dispel the *Chindi*?" Red Fox requested. "Can you show me how to draw the circle of protection?"

Little Turtle brought thumb and forefinger to pinch-massage the flesh between his eyebrows. "Do you know anything of why the *Chindi* was set into motion?"

"The grandfather in the mound has spoken through me," Red Fox replied.

Little Turtle arched a craggy brow, made a deep, grunting sound. "If you have such an ability, I would speak with the grandfather now."

"It happened at Barry's house," Red Fox explained. "I have always sought visions, but spirits have not spoken through me before. I do not think I could find the grandfather here."

Little Turtle shook his head, then smiled at Don. "The grandfather will find you if you summon him mentally. There is no time, no space where he awaits you. You must learn more of why he has not crossed to the Land of the Grandfathers."

Barry had finished his beer, and he set the glass back on the tray. "It's hard to believe how easily you accept all this, David."

David Little Turtle turned to regard Barry and to respond to his confusion. "Navajo is my first language, Barry. I didn't learn to speak American until it was pounded into me—literally and figuratively—at the mission school."

Red Fox wished to make the answer a dual response. "Barry, to practice traditional Indian Medicine is to live a total commitment to one's beliefs. And I mean a commitment that pervades every aspect of one's life."

Little Turtle grinned. "Well spoken, brother."

Barry shook his head. "You keep saying 'Medicine,' and I keep figuring you're talking about herbs and potions and roots and things."

"The word Medicine refers to the spirit, more than the body," Red Fox explained gently. "Medicine is power, spiritual power. Of course a good Medicine practitioner is most often also a good healer."

"Although Don and I are from different tribes, Barry, I am certain that we could agree that one's Medicine power begins with the vision quest," David said.

Don agreed quickly. "Yes, and the vision quest, with its emphasis on self-denial and spiritual discipline, then continues to a lifelong pursuit of wisdom by the serious traditionalist."

David Little Turtle laughed softly. "And I am a serious traditionalist, in spite of my minor vices."

Barry understood. It was as if two Roman Catholics might not agree whether a good Christian should drink or smoke. "And you both seek visions, the way Don has described the process to me?"

David did not hesitate to admit to it. "Yes, we believe that the essence of the Great Spirit can be found in everything. We revere and have a great passion for the Earth Mother, and we are very much aware of our place in the web of life and our responsibility for all plant and animal life.

"That's what most often sets a *Chindi* in motion,"

David said, reaching for yet another little cigar. "When someone thoughtlessly violates the Earth Mother or behaves in an irresponsible way toward plant or animal life. Sometimes, even disrespect for rocks and landscape will bring about punishment by the *Chindi*."

"Like an angry nature spirit," Barry mused, remembering the fairy tales his grandmother used to read to him. "Or a perturbed elf or brownie."

"In its milder manifestations," Don agreed tentatively. "But our *Chindi* has been called into existence by a powerful Navajo healer, and even though that took place nearly a hundred years ago, the energy is still there to punish in a bloody and horrible way."

Little Turtle sat forward in his chair. "You learn that from the spirit of the grandfather? I mean, about the *Chindi* being called into being by a Navajo doctor?"

Don nodded. "Barry and his wife heard him speak and tell the story."

Little Turtle glanced at Barry for confirmation. Awkward as the moment was, Barry could not deny what he and Carol had heard. There was no way he knew to verify such information, however.

"We did hear a voice that claimed to be a Medicine man named Moon Bear speak through Don," Barry affirmed.

"Summon Moon Bear now." Little Turtle's voice had more than a little demanding tone to it as he made the request of Don Red Fox.

Red Fox took a sip of his ice water, leaned back in the overstuffed chair in which he had been sitting. He took several deep breaths, as if he were a swimmer about to dive into a pool.

Little Turtle snuffed out his cigar and settled back into the cushions of his own chair.

Red Fox would take three or four deep breaths, then sit quietly for thirty or forty seconds before he repeated the full expansion of his chest. It was on the

seventh or eighth repetition of the process that Don's breathing rate sharply accelerated. His eyes closed and his head dropped forward on his chest. Barry recognized the small gurgling sounds that began somewhere deep within Don's throat.

The Mesquakie began to rock back and forth in his chair, then his head snapped up and his brown eyes were wide open. The reed-thin voice told Barry that Moon Bear had once again entered Red Fox's body.

"This Medicine brother's spirit has again attracted me to its warmth," the voice said. *"I find it pleasant to be in his body again."*

Little Turtle leaned forward, propped his elbows on his knees. "You are Moon Bear?"

"That is how I am called," the voice answered. *"I feel the power of your Medicine, but I am ashamed for you that you have the white eyes' bad manners. How is it that you are so rude as to ask a man his name?"*

"Forgive me, Grandfather," Little Turtle apologized. "It is only because time is so important that I have forgotten my manners."

Moon Bear made a clucking sound. *"I feel your power, but how can time become important? You have great Medicine, but you behave as rudely as some of the half-breeds around Wovoka's encampment."*

"You were with Wovoka?" Little Turtle risked the old one's ire by again asking a direct question.

"I was as his brother," Moon Bear answered, moving Red Fox's body proudly erect. *"I served the Messiah well, until my own vision came. I saw the Ghost Dance the way it was meant to be danced."*

"You are Paiute."

"Of course. And you are a half-breed Navajo. It was a Navajo healer who showed me kindness when the old, bearded white eyes shot me. I was going to the land of the Apache."

"Why?"

"To bring them the Ghost Dance. They could have driven the whites from this entire land with the magic I would have brought them."

"And how did Wovoka feel about your mission?"

"The Messiah sent me away from his shadow. He was very angry with me. He blamed me for what happened to the Sioux at Wounded Knee."

Little Turtle's mouth gaped. "You brought the Ghost Dance to Wounded Knee?"

"If Sitting Bull had not ordered certain changes in the shirt, the dance would have worked," Moon Bear protested defensively. *"The bullets from the yellow legs' guns would have turned to water against the shirts."*

"Enough history lessons," Little Turtle whispered to Barry. "Moon Bear," he asked of the spirit, "why was the *Chindi* sung into being?"

Moon Bear sighed impatiently. *"The Thing that is Everything and No Thing was sung to life by a healer in order to protect me and my possessions while he went to seek the aid of one greater than he to seal my wounds."*

"Tell me, did the healer make a circle before he began the song?" David asked. "Think! Try to remember. It is important."

Moon Bear made a small whimpering sound. *"It seems as though he did. I was in great pain. Old White Beard had torn my body terribly with a shotgun."*

"What does that tell you?" Barry whispered to David. "I mean, about the circle and all?"

"Pieces," Little Turtle shook his head. "They're just pieces. But I need all the clues I can get."

"Can you sing the right chant to put the *Chindi* to rest?" Barry asked.

"The half-breed can!" Moon Bear's brief affirmation ended in a sob of joy. *"The image of a beautiful white buffalo maiden appeared before me and*

whispered to me that he can send the Thing that is Everything and No Thing away from me!"

Little Turtle nodded. "I think I can. But first all artifacts must be returned to the grave. All artifacts and the skeleton, of course."

"*Fools have them!*" Moon Bear shouted angrily. "*You must make them return all things to the burial mound at once.*"

"Well, Moon Bear," Little Turtle chuckled, "that will probably be easier said than done."

"You can't stop the *Chindi* now?" Barry had to know.

Little Turtle shook his head. "The *Chindi* has been set into motion. It cannot be stopped until all artifacts have been returned. I can draw a circle that will hold the *Chindi* at bay, Barry; but I cannot prevent the *Chindi* from completing its mission. Somehow we must convince the pothunters to return all the burial gifts—and the skeleton—at once!"

Moon Bear laughed a wheezing, rasping cackle. "*It may be quicker to let the Chindi do what it has been created to do. The greedy white eyes will fight and argue to keep those worthless pots and my dried-up bones. Let the Chindi collect my burial gifts. They will not argue with the Chindi!*"

Barry looked hard into David Little Turtle's eyes. "We've got to get them to return those artifacts!"

Little Turtle answered him at last. "Yes. We've got to at least try, or the *Chindi* will kill them one by one."

Twenty-Five

Don Red Fox, David Little Turtle, and Barry Jacobs agreed to meet in Goldwater's department store parking lot at eight o'clock. From this point they would proceed in Barry's car to the home of Professor Carl Fredericks, where they would demand the return of the skeletal remains of Moon Bear. In their collective opinion the skeleton seemed the most likely target for the next deadly visit from the *Chindi*.

Barry had dropped Don off in front of his apartment building, then sped off for Pinnacle Peak so that he might have Carol and Bobby safely registered at the McCormick Inn before dark.

Don stood at the bottom of the steps of the third-rate motel where he had rented a room commensurate with his poverty-level budget. He debated for a moment whether or not he should cross Van Buren and get something to eat at Hobo Joe's restaurant.

He dug into his pockets and found less than two dollars. Barry had bought lunch. He hated to be a beggar, but maybe tonight, after they had obtained the bones from Fredericks—and they *would* get that skeleton!—maybe he could hit either Barry or David for a small loan.

Don looked up the dark stairs and decided that he

could use a nap, or perhaps a period of meditation, more than he could use the food. It was a decision that nearly cost him his life.

The wooden steps protested his climb with sudden, sharp squeaks. The building had probably been in decent shape about the time of World War II. Now old ramshackle motels like this one remained only to house transients and down-on-their-luck drifters.

Don Red Fox was longing for the green, lush trees and grasses of the Mesquakie settlement near Tama, Iowa, as he unlocked the splintered, faded door to his room. Now he wished that he were entering the clean, comfortable home of his parents instead of this hot, dirty haven for rats and beetles. He would do his best to complete his work soon, so that he might . . .

The blow that struck him across the shoulders came at him from the darkness of the room. It was more of a push than a punch, but it took him totally off guard.

He lunged forward, stumbled over the wooden chair with the threadbare cushion, and fell against the paintless dresser that held his clothes. At the same time that his shoulder smashed painfully into the dresser, he heard the door slam.

"Who's here?" he shouted, attempting to struggle to his feet. The challenge was neither original nor commanding, but it was all he could think of to say.

Then he was blinking his eyes against the sudden flash of the overhead light bulb, and he was provided with the answer to his question.

Cal Hawkins stood over him, his right hand gripping a stout, wooden staff about three feet in length that appeared to be something between a walking stick and a baseball bat.

Carlos Dominquez leaned against the door, his thick arms folded across his broad chest.

Jake Hardesty had one gloved hand on the light switch. In the other hand he held a Colt .45 revolver. It was pointed at the specific vicinity of Don's skull.

"Damn Injun," Cal shook his head angrily. "We was about to give up on you. You took forever getting back here."

There was no need to ask them how they had found out where he lived. Barry must have told him earlier that day.

"What's the idea?" Red Fox snapped, trying for the offensive position. "What the hell is the idea breaking into my room like this? You guys must be crazy."

Red Fox had managed to get into a crouch before the lights had come on. Now he began slowly to straighten his back, keeping both eyes on the revolver in old Jake's hand.

Hawkins leaned forward with the staff and pushed Don back on the floor. "I like you right there on the floor, red man."

"Or on his knees," Jake cackled.

Carlos said nothing, his large, expressive brown eyes looked angry and resolute.

Red Fox felt sweat break out all over his body. It was hot and close in the room, and the shirts of the three men who had invaded his lodgings all had great half-moons of perspiration under the arms. Cal's hair was matted damply to his forehead, and the sweat-band of Jake's ancient hat appeared moist. Carlos made a sound similar to a rasping cough as he took out a yellow handkerchief and wiped his forehead and cheekbones.

"I'm going to ask you one more time," Don said, trying his best to sound in control of the situation. "Just what the hell are you doing in my room?"

Cal Hawkins laughed as if Red Fox had just told them the latest joke going the rounds of the Phoenix bars.

"He's going to ask us 'one more time,'" Cal mocked him. "Then what are you going to do, red man?" Cal wanted to know, leveling the club at Don's head as if he were about to tee off. "Are you going to throw us out of here?"

"It will soon be dark," Don told them, trying a different tactic. "Have you returned the pots and all the other artifacts which you took from the grave in the Jacobses' backyard?"

Cal snorted contemptuously and sat down noisily on the rickety bed next to where Don lay sprawled. "You figure the *Chindi* gonna come get us, man?"

"Barry said that he had hoped that you would believe him."

Cal grinned smugly. "But old Cal ain't no greenhorn like Mr. Barry Jacobs. And old Cal is not likely to fall for any Indian ghost stories."

"But it is true," Red Fox protested. "There is a *Chindi*!"

"Sure," Jake agreed. "And we've got him surrounded."

Carlos spoke up for the first time since Don had entered the room. "Those have been our friends that you have been killing."

"That *I* have been killing?" Red Fox's astonished question provided him with frightening enlightenment. These men somehow believed that he had been murdering their fellow pothunters on some bizarre campaign of Indian vengeance.

"How could you possibly think that I have been killing these people?" Red Fox demanded. "How could I get roosters and owls and coyotes to kill people?"

"That's a damn good question," Jake quickly agreed. "But we figure that you know the answer."

"We figure that you have been somehow making it appear that animals have been killing our friends," Carlos explained in his tight-lipped manner.

"Yeah," Cal nodded, tapping the thick wooden club idly against the heel of the boot he had crossed over a knee as he sat on the edge of the bed. "When Barry was trying to convince me that a *Chindi* was goin' around ripping folks apart, I realized that you had totally managed to bamboozle those pilgrims.

"When Deputy Rambo arrived with the terrible news about Sam and Merry, well, let me tell you that I was mighty torn up. I kept Barry talking so's I could get your address and so's I could try to get some kind of fix on just how the hell you was accomplishing all these terrible crimes."

"And just what have you figured out, Cal?" Don asked. "Just how have I been able to accomplish the murders?"

Cal hoisted the staff and held it but a few inches from Red Fox's left eye. Don felt a moment of panic as he feared the man might suddenly lurch forward and put out his eye with the narrowed end of the club.

"I gotta admit that I am stumped," Cal said, lowering the tip of the staff back down to the floor. "Carlos had one theory. Jake had another. I came up with a third idea and a combination of Carlos's and Jake's theorizing. Jake said you smeared some kinda scent on your victims which would attract wild critters and inspire them to attack. Carlos figured you was attaching claws and things to your fingers and doing the bloody work with your bare hands. I thought you might be doing both or that you might be using animals and birds that you had trained to kill people."

Don shook his head sadly. "You three guys really are crazy. I only found out about the dig in the Jacobses' backyard four days ago. How did I manage to plan such a vicious campaign in so little time?"

"Oh, hey, man, we gotta hand it to you," Cal admitted. "You are probably some kind of evil genius, some kind of criminal mastermind. We don't know how you did these terrible things, man. We've struck out on our theorizing. But we know that *you* know how you did it. And we sure as hell will know your bloody secrets before we finish with you."

Don felt a hollow pocket of fear being carved out in his stomach. It seemed as though these three men were intent on doing him great bodily harm in an ef-

fort to learn a secret that he did not possess. All he could do was to tell them the truth.

"I am a man of peace," Don began, hoping that he could keep his voice steady. "I would hurt no one. I am trying to help you all. I am . . ."

Don had been leaning on an arm stiffened against an outstretched palm and fingers. Cal suddenly brought his club down across the Mesquakie's splayed fingers. Don instinctively flinched from the pain, doubling his elbow, clutching his smashed fingers, slamming a shoulder against the floor.

"Deputy Rambo said that if you were only marked up a little, no one would ask any questions," Cal said coldly.

As the first fire of the blow passed, Red Fox felt a blessed numbness suffusing his fingers. He knew that that, too, would pass into a steady pain, but he was thankful for the surcease of agony, however transient it might prove to be. He wondered what chance he might have if he tried to make a run for it. Would the old man really pull the trigger of the revolver?

"How about doing it the easy way, Red Fox?" Carlos suggested in that level voice of his. "Confess to the crimes and tell us how you did them."

Don sat up, leaning on the uninjured hand. "There really is a *Chindi*. Ask Barry. He saw it. Ask his wife. She saw it, too."

"Two greenhorns who got taken in by Injun bullshit," Jake said soberly, passing sentence on the reputed experiences of Barry and Carol Jacobs.

"Confess to us now," Carlos argued. "For before we finish with you, we will have your confession. And we will know when you are telling us the truth."

"I am telling you the truth now," Red Fox sighed. "Tonight David Little Turtle, Barry, and I are going to go to Professor Carl Fredericks and demand that he return the skeleton so that we might give it proper burial. Once we have regained all the artifacts, then

Little Turtle is certain that he can put the *Chindi* to rest."

"You will not be keeping your rendezvous with Barry and David Little Turtle," Carlos said. "You will have confessed by then and you will be in jail."

"Barry and his wife are going to thank us later, after they realize the fools you made of them," Cal nodded reflectively. "And Little Turtle will be damn glad we interfered and let him keep his reputation untarnished before he was associated with a psycho Injun killer."

"By now it must be dark outside," Don said softly. "You have left your loved ones unattended. Any one of them may be at the mercy of the *Chindi* right now."

Jake's laugh was a high-pitched cackle. "The *Chindi* don't look so fierce when he's sprawled on his ass."

"You would be well advised to confess." Carlos was still doing his best to persuade Red Fox to take advantage of his painless offer of confession and prison. "Jake is a master of the bullwhip. He can skin you alive with that devil whip of his."

Several large droplets of sweat oozed through Red Fox's headband and trickled over his forehead. "How would you explain then the marks of a whip to the police?" he asked, hoping he did not already know the answer he would be told.

Cal grinned as he removed a cigarette from a pack in his shirt pocket and hung the filtered butt on his lower lip. "Like Deputy Rambo said, as long as you ain't too terrible marked up, no one will ask any questions or complain. They're just gonna be happy that we have captured a murderer and heard his confession after we made us a citizen's arrest."

Cal touched the flame of a kitchen match to his cigarette and drew the smoke into his lungs. As he exhaled the fragrant cloud, he got to his feet.

"Let's get moving, red man. We're going for a ride in the desert."

Cal slammed the edge of the thick staff against Red Fox's ribs. The Mesquakie gritted his teeth against the pain.

"Shoot me here," Don told them. "Tell the police that you killed me while resisting your citizen's arrest."

"Damn good idee," Jake cackled.

Cal pushed Jake aside and brought the staff down hard over Red Fox's shoulders. Don grunted his anger and his hurt.

"You gonna walk outa here or are we going to carry you?" Cal wanted to know. He stood with the staff poised for another stout rap over the shoulders—or maybe the head this time.

"Just confess now," Carlos repeated his argument. "Confess right here and now, and save us all a lot of trouble."

Don got slowly to his feet. He had no desire to be cudgeled to death by Cal and his club. "You boys are gonna find out what trouble really is," he said. "You're gonna find out how brave you are against a *Chindi*."

Jake prodded him with the barrel of the revolver. "We sure as hell ain't afraid of this goddamn *Chindi*. Move your ass, redskin!"

Carlos opened the door, stepped out of the room, and began the descent down the creaky, moldering stairs. Jake kept poking Red Fox with the revolver to let him know that he was right behind him. Cal followed, his club cradled in an arm so that he looked like some perverse shepherd.

Red Fox wondered if he would have a chance if he slammed a knee into Carlos's back, then jumped over him as he stumbled down the steps. Would Jake risk shooting if he knew the slug might tear into his friend? If Jake would hesitate, could he outrun the three men? He knew he could outpace the old man.

Carlos might get hurt in the fall. Cal was lanky and looked in pretty good shape, but could he run?

But then they were heading toward Cal's Cadillac, and it was too late to use the stairs to assist him in any escape attempt.

Should he just try running away right now? Should he push Carlos and take a chance on Jake shooting him? Hell, there was plenty of traffic here on Van Buren. Surely the old man wouldn't plug him in the possible view of so many passing motorists. Where the hell was a cop car?

"Keep that forty-five tucked under your hat, Jake," Cal cautioned him. "We don't want any public-minded citizens thinking that they're seeing something wrong."

Carlos opened the back door on the curbside and slid across to the window. Jake shoved Red Fox so that he stumbled in next to Carlos, then the old man dropped down beside him, the revolver inches from his nose. Cal walked slowly around to the driver's seat, as casually as if he were driving his friends around for a Saturday night on the town.

All four men rode in silence as Cal tooted the big car toward Scottsdale Road. Jake made some comments about three teen-aged girls loitering in front of the Burger King, then Cal turned right and headed south.

Carlos was breathing heavily, avoiding Don's eyes. Red Fox felt a certain determined dignity in the man. It seemed that he could read Carlos's inner self and understand that he was not proud that he was taking the law into his own hands; but, at the same time, he sincerely believed that Don had killed his friends and that he must do something distasteful that needed doing in order to assist the law.

Jake Hardesty, on the other hand, leered at him with something that approached sexual avidity. How could the old man so enjoy inflicting pain upon others? How could he feel *that* powerful simply holding

a loaded revolver on another person? Jake had a peculiar musky odor to his body, an odor that made Don think of foxes or rats in a confined area. He turned to look deep into Jake's eyes. The man did have a feral quality to his small, narrowed, bloodshot orbs.

"What you lookin' at, redskin?" Jake growled a warning. "Don't you go gettin' no ideas. I'd just as soon shoot you as look at you. In fact, I would rather shoot you than look at you!"

Cal's eyes were on them in the rearview mirror. "I promised Deputy Rambo that I would bring him back a live Injun murderer," he told Red Fox. "Don't you make us have to blow your head in half."

"That sun has been down for nearly an hour," Red Fox said. "The *Chindi* now has power. Soon it will be coming for the skeleton or some more pots or the Medicine bag or the Sharps rifle. And you have left your loved ones unprotected."

"But we have the *Chindi* right with us in the back-seat of my Cadillac car," Cal said evenly. "You can cut that superstitious shit with us, Red Fox. All we want to hear from your mouth is how you murdered our friends."

Red Fox shook his head sadly. "How can I convince you that I had nothing to do with those deaths?"

"You can't," Cal said simply. "So just be the tight-lipped Injun until you want to tell us about your murderin' ways."

"Carlos," Red Fox began, attempting another, more direct approach, "is your wife alone at home?"

"Shut up," Carlos replied, his dark eyes angry. "I told you the first day I saw you that you talked too much."

"Do you have any animals in the house?" Don persisted. He had nothing to lose. "A dog. A cat. The *Chindi* uses the bodies of animals to attack those who have violated the old one's grave. Remember, the

roosters attacked Gooch, the owls attacked Ramon, the coyotes . . .”

“Jake!” Cal shouted, “Shove that fuckin’ barrel down his throat!”

Jake raised the revolver threateningly. Red Fox raised his hands in defense. “Okay. All right. I only want to help you, to warn you.”

Jake lowered the barrel. “Help yourself, you dumb bastard! Tell us what we want to know so we’s can dump your stinkin’ carcass on the cops’ front door.”

Cal stopped at a busy intersection, then turned east. “I’m going on Number Sixty to Apache Junction,” he told his friends. Unless Mr. Red Fox wants to save us all the trouble and confess, I’m heading toward a deserted old mountain trail I know in the Superstitions. There we will not be disturbed until Mr. Red Fox has told us all that we want to know.”

“That means, you dumb bastard,” Jake explained crudely, “that you got about forty, forty-five minutes before I get my bullwhip outa the trunk and start slicing your red hide into little bitty bits.”

“Confess,” Carlos pleaded. “Tell us what we want to know—now!”

“Carlos, I swear by all that I hold holy that I have not harmed any of your friends,” Red Fox told him. “I swear by all things sacred that the *Chindi* is the thing that has been doing these terrible acts of violence.”

“Jesus H. Christ!” Cal snorted from the driver’s seat. “That is the thing about Injuns that I have marveled at since I was a pup. I mean, the way that they can look you eyeball to eyeball and lie through their fuckin’ teeth.”

Red Fox settled back in the seat. There was nothing more to say. He would try to remain calm. He must keep his wits about him. Perhaps when they stopped the car, he could make a dash for it and lose them in the mountains. To continue to plead with them for reason would be to invite a blow from

Jake's revolver. He must do nothing at this point that might injure him or sap his strength.

He took a deep breath, tried his best to free his mind of all thoughts. He would function best if he could maintain a tranquility, an inner peace.

Red Fox did not permit external awareness to penetrate his internal domain of harmony until he felt the automobile chassis responding to a rough and bumpy road.

He had observed time's relativity ever since he had been a small boy. When his father went into the grocery store and told him that he would bring back an ice-cream cone if Don could sit quietly for five minutes, those minutes seemed like hours. But when, later in life, he had five minutes to say good-bye to Mary Esther before she took the bus back to the university, those minutes were less than seconds.

Now it seemed hard to believe that the forty-five minutes Jake had promised him had already expired.

"Jesus, man," Jake shouted at Cal. "Slow down or you'll ruin your shocks."

"This road will dent your axles, man," Carlos grunted as his head struck the ceiling.

Don thought of Mary Esther. He did not permit himself to do so very often. They had been married for ten years. They had at last been ready to start their family. Then Mary Esther had been killed in an automobile accident. So quickly, so completely she had been removed from his life. Late one afternoon he was smiling and waving and calling after the car as it drove down the lane to the highway: "Don't forget the flour!" Four afternoons later he was burying her.

Cal braked the Cadillac in front of a clump of trees. He shut off the ignition but left the lights on. "Let's move it out," he said over his shoulder.

Carlos put a large hand on Red Fox's arm. "Tell us, man. That old sonuvabitch loves to hurt people with that whip of his."

Don put his own hand over Carlos's fingers and squeezed them firmly. "It is the *Chindi*. I can say nothing more."

The overhead light came on as Cal opened his door and stepped outside. "Watch your footing," he said. "It's kinda rocky around here."

Jake got out and started pulling at Don's arm. "Come on out!" he grinned along the revolver's blue-black barrel. "You and me got us some dancin' to do."

Cal was unlocking the trunk as Don was being prodded around the back of the Cadillac. As Cal handed Jake the coiled bullwhip, Don was astonished to see the Sharps rifle and a pot from Moon Bear's grave resting on a couple of old army blankets.

Cal caught Red Fox's gaze and made contemptuous, growling laughter deep in his throat. "Yeah, that sumbitch Barry almost convinced me until I started thinkin' what a prize sap I had been. That's when I called these boys and told 'em that we had work to do."

Jake pushed Red Fox hard, and the Mesquakie stumbled over some loose rock, nearly went down on his knees.

Cal took the revolver from Jake. "You want us to tie him?"

Jake shook his head. "Ain't necessary. He can't outrun this whip. If he tries, I'll snap his legs right out from under him."

Red Fox thought of his mother and his father. He could see his mother walking in their orchards, gathering large, red apples in her apron. He had an image of his father, his glasses edging down from the bridge of his nose, holding the newspaper at arm's length. Pop still moved his lips when he read.

He thought of his grandfather and his grandmother . . .

Red Fox shook his head. Why was he thinking of

his home in Iowa, of his dead wife, or his parents and his grandparents? Was he about to die?

Jake jerked his arm in a sudden motion, and the long whip uncoiled with a popping sound that cracked as loud as if the .45 had gone off.

Red Fox felt something sting his cheek. He put his fingers to the side of his mouth and felt the stickiness of his own blood.

Cal caught Jake's wrists. "Last chance, Red Fox."

Red Fox held his arms up at his side, palms skyward in the classic American Indian attitude of prayerful supplication. "I have killed no one," he told them.

The whip struck his shoulder with more force than Red Fox had imagined. The blow spun him around awkwardly, so that the next lash caught him at the nape of the neck. Red stars swirled before his eyes, and he felt himself falling toward the rock-strewn earth.

But he did not strike the rocks that would have bruised his body. Strong hands were supporting him. Astonished he looked up to see an Indian in a Ghost Shirt standing next to him. He knew it was Moon Bear.

"*Fear not, Medicine Brother,*" Moon Bear said. "*The Thing that is Everything and No Thing is near!*"

The lash stung Red Fox's upperarm, and he raised his hands to protect his face. Moon Bear had vanished.

But the next blow did not come. Instead Red Fox heard Jake Hardesty's agonized scream and the rapid beating of leathery wings.

Don looked out between the loose wall of his protective fingers. The largest black bat that he had ever seen had fastened itself to the old man's face and forehead.

Jake dropped the whip and writhed piteously on

the ground, his bootheels slamming the earth like a punished child having a tantrum.

"Get it off!" he screamed. "For Gawd's sake, *get it off!*"

Cal and Carlos stood by helplessly. Both men crouched next to their beleaguered friend, their hands swooping at the monster bat. Then they straightened up, uncertain how best to proceed. Cal hoisted his thick staff, then hesitated, wondering how he could smash the bat without crushing Jake's skull.

The wings of the night-flying creature beat furiously at Jake's head. "It's eating my face!" Hardesty screamed like a man on the verge of madness.

At last Cal fought back primitive fear and remembered the protective covering of his ever-present black leather gloves. He knelt beside his old friend, brought both hands around the bat's torso, and pulled the creature from Jake's face.

The snapping snout of the bat was dripping blood as Cal slammed it to the ground. "Stomp the god-damn thing!" he yelled at Carlos.

Carlos did as he was told and slammed a bootheel down hard into the bat's large head. The first blow brought an incredibly high-pitched squeal from the thing, but Carlos's next strike silenced the bat forever, its brains mashed from its furry skull.

"Jesus, God in Heaven!" Cal panted, falling back on the ground away from the bloody, winged creature. "What the hell made the bat do that!"

"I have never seen so large a bat in all of my life," Carlos said, bending over the thing as he wiped his soiled heel on a clump of grass.

Jake was doubled over in a fetal position, making gurgling and whimpering sounds of pain.

"It is the *Chindi*," Red Fox told them, approaching the men. "You have killed the great bat, but the *Chindi* will soon return in another form."

Cal pulled Jake's revolver from his belt and leveled it at Red Fox's chest. "Hold it right there," he

warned. But he said nothing more. He seemed to be conducting some weighty inner dialogue with himself.

"We must get Jake immediately to a hospital," Carlos said.

A crashing sound in the brush just to the side of the area illuminated by the Cadillac's headlights caused all three men to turn in that direction.

Carlos began praying in Spanish when they heard a hideous high-pitched scream issue from the darkened clump of trees.

"The *Chindi* wants the rifle and the pot you have in your trunk," Don explained.

"That was no *Chindi*, you superstitious moron," Cal growled. "That was a mountain lion. And if he comes messing around here, I'll blow away his ass with this forty-five!"

"Quiet!" Carlos said. He had raised his right hand to cup his ear. "Listen! That is the sound of something walking on two feet."

The mountain lion broke free of the brush and stepped into the circle of light cast by the headlamps. It was a large male, sleek, powerfully built. It was walking on its hind legs. Its eyes did not reflect light. It was as if its eyes were dead.

"*Madre de Dios*," Carlos whispered as he crossed himself. "What is it, Cal?"

Jake screamed, as if he, too, could sense the approach of the nightmare apparition that was walking on its hind legs toward them.

"Do you not hear the sound of the flute and the drum?" Red Fox asked them. "It is the *Chindi*!"

Red Fox went to his knees and began to trace the magic circle that David Little Turtle had described. "Join me in this circle! It can keep the *Chindi* at bay."

Cal fired at the approaching lion. Once. Twice. Three times.

The first shot went wild, slamming into a tree. The

second round sprayed dirt and rock around the lion's feet. The third showered sparks as it struck a boulder behind the animal.

"Steady, man, for Christ's sake," Carlos encouraged his friend.

The lion was less than twenty feet away.

"Step into the circle," Red Fox told them. "Leave the car and come into the circle with me."

He had drawn the circle as best he could remember it. David Little Turtle had sketched it for him on a pad after he had emerged from trance. He could only hope that he had remembered all the symbols.

Cal's fourth shot furrowed a red streak on the lion's right shoulder. Tufts of tawny hair and globules of blood were torn from the animal, but it gave no evidence of pain or of being deterred from its single-minded purpose.

"The *Chindi* is within it!" Red Fox shouted. "And if you kill that lion, the *Chindi* will only return in the body of a coyote, an owl, a rattlesnake . . ."

The fifth shot shattered the right paw of the fast-approaching lion. Although Cal desperately pulled the trigger, there was no sixth shot. Jake had many years before developed the habit of leaving the hammer to rest on an empty chamber—hence his "six-shooter" fired only five times.

The lion had narrowed the gap between them, and with a hissing scream of rage, it swept a heavily muscled paw in a wide arc that painfully clawed both Cal and Carlos. Carlos went down under the lion's weight, his legs and arms thrashing in panic.

Cal struck the lion's head several times with the steel barrel of the revolver. The .45, devoid of its cartridges, was now fit only to be used as a club. With a howl of protest the lion left Carlos to attack Cal.

"Step into the circle!" Don Red Fox continued to shout. "It cannot penetrate the circle!"

Cal was swinging his stout staff at the lion, trying his best to keep the club out of the range of the

sweeping claws. If the lion caught the wooden stick and flung it from Cal's hands, the tall man would have no defense other than his hands against the big cat's fury.

In a moment born of confusion and courage, Carlos got to his feet, ran to assist his friend, and launched a powerful kick to the lion's ribs. The cat was knocked off-balance, but with a twist of its sinewy body, it quickly righted itself and turned to go for Carlos.

But Cal was on it with his staff, delivering solid blows that forced the lion into a self-protective crouch.

Red Fox had left the circle once, to drag Jake Hardesty within its protective perimeters, but he was reluctant to do so again. Although he had not violated Moon Bear's grave, the *Chindi* just might include him in the carnage if he attempted to fight against it.

"Cal! Carlos!" Red Fox called their names. "Step into the magic circle now that you have a chance."

Carlos turned to see the Indian and the old man as if for the first time. Dazed, comprehending little, there was something about Red Fox's shouting and beckoning that at last seemed fully to penetrate his consciousness. He backed cautiously away from the lion, now momentarily cowering as Cal kept at it with his cudgel.

Red Fox grabbed the back of Carlos's shirt and pulled him into the safety of the medicine circle. "Now you, Cal," the Mesquakie shouted. "Keep swinging the staff and slowly, carefully back toward us. I'll pull you in as soon as I can reach you."

Cal was breathing heavily, but he continued to flail away at the big cat in an almost rhythmic series of blows.

"We've got to get him in the circle," Red Fox told Carlos.

Carlos nodded, stepped from the magic circle, ran

the ten feet or so to Cal, and grabbed him under his arms. Before Cal could protest, Carlos had hoisted him in the air and back-stepped both of them into the safety of the Medicine that Red Fox had traced on the ground.

The lion rose to its hind legs and rushed toward the circle.

Red Fox gave a small "yip-yip" of triumph when he saw the *Chindi*-possessed mountain lion shrink back. The dead eyes rolled in its skull, and the large jaws opened and closed angrily. It made a couple of tentative jabs with its raking claws, then it backed away.

"I don't believe this, man," Cal said through clenched teeth.

"What is it going to do now?" Carlos asked Red Fox.

"It is heading for the artifacts in the trunk," Don replied.

The lion stood before the open trunk of Cal's Cadillac, then it dropped to the ground as if a slug from a high-caliber rifle had torn away its brain.

"What the hell is happening now?" Cal asked.

"It's not dead," Carlos provided. "It is still breathing."

"Watch," was all Red Fox would tell them.

The mountain lion sat up, blinked its eyes. It yowled in pain, made a couple of tentative wipes at its shattered paw with its long, coarse tongue. Then it saw the four men in the circle. It leaped to all fours, gave them an angry, parting hiss, then ran for the dark forest on three legs, bending the wounded forepaw next to its body.

"The *Chindi* has left it," Red Fox said. "But don't leave the circle!"

The tops of the trees began to shake and twist as if being worked by a violent wind.

Wide-eyed, Cal shook his head in disbelief. "I hear

a flute, a drum. Sounds like Navajo music for some ritual."

"I am frightened," Carlos said honestly. "I do not understand these things."

"Just stay in the circle," Red Fox repeated.

Then the black, boiling, churning wind shaped itself into a dust devil of near palpable form and substance. It hovered over the Cadillac's open trunk, then spun the Sharps rifle and the Navajo pot into the air as if cradling the objects in protective arms of roiling dust and leaves.

Carlos leaned heavily on Red Fox. "I did not believe that such things really existed."

As the swirling dust devil moved into the forest, Red Fox assessed the physical condition of the three men who had brought him to this lonely place to make him confess to the murders which the *Chindi* had perpetrated.

Jake Hardesty's face was horribly clawed and bitten. It appeared as though one eye might be permanently damaged.

Carlos was bleeding profusely from a wound across his chest and from a nasty gouge at the base of his neck.

Cal Hawkins was clawed across the chest and left shoulder.

"Once again, it is the red man's burden," the Mesquakie sighed. "I'd better get all of you to the nearest hospital."

Tears were rolling down Carlos's cheeks. "To hell with the hospital. My Elena is all alone at home. The pots from the Jacobs dig are there with her. So are hundreds of other objects I have looted from Indian graves for more than thirty years."

Don immediately felt his concern. "What of Jake? Has he a woman?"

"Not within the memory of anyone who knows him today," Cal said. "Red Fox, I know I got a helluva lot to say to you—and by God I'll say it! But right

now we gotta throw old Jake into the backseat, and you gotta get behind the wheel of that Caddy and get us to Elena. Kathy's working, but I guess she'd be okay anyway, since the *Chindi* already grabbed our stuff."

Red Fox took the keys that Cal handed him. "The *Chindi* has only been making one hit per night," Don said, attempting to calm Carlos's fears. "Barry, Little Turtle, and I figured that its next visit would have been to Professor Fredericks to get back the bones."

Carlos shook his head. "I feel I am to be punished for what we were about to do to you and for what I have done to Indian burial mounds for so many years. I feel the *Chindi* looked into my heart and saw how black it really is."

Don knelt beside Jake, cradled him under the arms, and prepared to lift him as Cal bent to grab the old man's legs.

Red Fox was never one to discount visions, dreams, and intuitions. If Carlos had experienced such a sensation when he confronted the *Chindi*, then the avenging angel might indeed be heading toward his unprotected home and his innocent wife.

"We must drive there quickly," Carlos urged. "You must draw a medicine circle around my house."

Don hoisted the moaning, twisting Jake. Cal dealt with the old man's legs as they pumped themselves in panic against the eternal memory of the giant bat that had attached itself to his face.

"I will drive fast," Don told him. "We will be in time."

Red Fox was saddened when an image of Moon Bear flashed before his eyes and told him that it was too late. The *Chindi* was already circling the Dominguez home.

Twenty-Six

Carol dozed in front of the television set. Channel five had just shown the last reel of a forties' film in which Errol Flynn had won another segment of World War II. Now the silver-haired, sexy, but clean Phil Donohue was interviewing a husband and wife psychologist team and members of two different families on the varied problems of rearing stepchildren.

Bobby slept soundly on a rollaway bed that a smiling, tanned college boy moonlighting as a bellhop had brought into their room at the McCormick Inn. Barry and Carol had agreed that it was best to underplay the *Chindi* in order to avoid seeding a future trauma in Bobby's young psyche. She had explained their leaving their new home to stay at a motel as the result of carpenters coming to repair a fault in the house.

The three of them had eaten dinner in the motel dining room before Barry had left them to join David Little Turtle and Don Red Fox on a mission to Professor Fredericks to demand the return of the skeleton of Moon Bear. She had kissed Barry good-bye, wished him luck.

That had been seven thirty. That had been six

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hours ago. It was now one twenty, and she had not heard another word from her husband.

She hoped to God that Barry hadn't been talked into doing something really foolish, like accompanying the two Indians in a direct encounter with the *Chindi* over Moon Bear's grave.

She also hoped that Professor Fredericks hadn't called the campus police on the three men and had them all thrown in jail.

Carol got out of bed, crossed the room to the television set, and snapped it off. Phil would have to worry about stepchildren without her help tonight.

Tentatively she brought the bottle of beer she had left on top of the dresser to her lips. It was warm. She would never be able to fathom how Europeans could drink room-temperature beer.

She had had room service bring four beers to the room. Barry liked a beer before bedtime, and there were still two bottles in an ice bucket, chilled for the master's return.

She dipped her hand into the bucket. Most of the ice had melted, but the beer felt cold. It didn't take long to convince herself that she needed one of the beers more than Barry would need two.

The sound of the key in the lock startled her, and she jerked her hand back from the ice bucket as if she were a child caught reaching for the forbidden cookie jar.

"Where the hell have you been?" she asked Barry as he entered the room.

She felt very much like the mother who has been searching desperately for a missing child in a department store. She was terribly relieved to see her husband safely before her, but another aspect of herself wanted to spank him for worrying her so.

Barry brought an unsteady forefinger to his lips, and he made a shushing sound. "Don't wake Bobby," he warned her.

It was readily apparent that Barry most certainly

did not need both beers. It was obvious that he had already had more than his respectable three-drink limit. She fished a bottle out of the ice bucket and popped off the cap with the opener the bellboy had left. The cold beer felt soothing to her throat, raspy from too many nervous cigarettes—far too many for someone who smoked an average of two packs a year.

"Where the hell have you been?" she tried again in a lower register. "I've been worried half out of my skull."

Barry slumped down on the king-sized bed. "That has made two of us, kid," he sighed as he lay back against the pillows, not bothering to slip off his shoes. "Three of us. Mustn't forget Little Turtle."

"And what about Don Red Fox?" Carol asked.

"Have mercy on me. Hand me that beer you have been so thoughtfully saving for me, and I'll tell you what happened."

Carol did as she was beseeched, and Barry told her how Don had failed to meet them in the Goldwater's parking lot at eight. Confused, they had driven to Don's apartment, found the door left unlocked, a chair broken.

They had decided not to drive to Tempe and visit Professor Fredericks without Don. Instead they made a telephone call to Fredericks's home—which they should have had sense enough to do before—and learned from Mrs. Fredericks that the professor was out of town supervising a dig and that he would not return until late afternoon the next day.

Little Turtle and Barry had driven about aimlessly for a time, speculating about what might have happened to Red Fox. They were growing more troubled by the minute.

They checked Red Fox's apartment once again and debated about whether or not to call the police. They drove around for another hour or so, decided against involving the authorities, and voted to go to

Little Turtle's home to wait for word from their missing ally.

"So why didn't you call me and let me know what was happening?" Carol interrupted her husband's narrative.

"I thought of it, of course, hon, but what would I have told you that wouldn't have upset you?"

Carol considered the rationale for a moment, then nodded for Barry to continue the story. She decided that he had sincerely acted on what he believed to be her best interests.

Barry told her how Red Fox had called them at last from the emergency ward at Scottsdale Memorial Hospital.

"Cal Hawkins had not been convinced by my visit to his place this morning," Barry shook his head sadly. "He, Carlos Dominquez, and Jake Hardesty jumped Red Fox right after I dropped him off. They took him out to the desert and were going to beat him into confessing to the murders of Gooch, Ramon, and the Hendersons."

Carol joined her husband on the bed. "How terrible! Did they hurt Red Fox? I mean, he was calling from the hospital . . ."

"The *Chindi* attacked them in the mountains." Barry swallowed hard. His eyes were staring vacantly at the ceiling as he spoke.

Carol shuddered, drew closer to her husband, and he instinctively put an arm around her shoulders.

"The *Chindi* got Jake really bad in the eyes," Barry continued. "Then it mauled both Carlos and Cal. Don managed to draw a magic circle that kept the *Chindi* from killing them all."

Barry tilted the bottle to his lips, finished the beer before he gave Carol his report of the remainder of the night's occurrences.

"They drove hell for leather back to Carlos's place. The *Chindi* had been there. Took the pots that Carlos had taken from Moon Bear's grave, then totally

demolished every other pot and artifact that he had collected for years. Carlos's wife was scared out her head, and she's in the hospital now in a state of shock. But the *Chindi* did not harm her physically."

Carol gasped her relief. "Thank God. But how do you think she managed to escape?"

"According to Red Fox, the *Chindi* will not harm those who are totally innocent of disrespect toward the Earth Mother or its creatures," Barry explained as best his fatigue-drenched brain could recall what the Mesquakie had told him. "I guess that Elena Dominquez had never participated in a single pot hunt in her entire marriage to Carlos. She is a very religious person, doesn't even eat meat, 'cause she loves animals so much. Red Fox figured that the *Chindi* could understand that Elena Dominquez had a good heart."

Tears were moving wetly over Carol's cheeks. "All this, Barry. I mean, this whole incredible nightmare. I mean, isn't it just too much?"

"Too much," Barry agreed. "I don't know if my brain ever will sort out all of it. And you know something even stranger?"

Carol shook her head, almost afraid to ask, but Barry told her the "strangeness" before she could oblige by inquiring.

"I am horny as hell in spite of everything."

Carol laughed, as much from relief that the "strangeness" was something earthy and recognizable as from pleasure that regardless of whatever bizarre crisis entered their lives, her husband would still find her desirable.

"You're crazy," she said; but she moved closer to him, anyway. "We haven't been to bed for about thirty-six hours."

He encircled Carol's wrist with his free hand and placed her fingers over his crotch. Carol had to admit that Barry was decidedly aroused.

"You're drunk," she accused him. But she felt herself responding to the thought of having sex.

"Bobby could wake up and see us," she pointed out.

"Shut out the light," Barry answered, brushing aside the feeble protest.

"He could still hear us."

Barry's hand massaging her left breast made her breath come faster.

"The bathroom," she whispered.

"What?" Barry frowned. "In the tub?"

"On the floor, silly," Carol giggled. "Take a couple of the pillows off the bed."

"I've got a king-sized bed on which to bump you good and proper, and you want me to bruise my knees on the phony marble floor?"

"That's what the pillows are for, dum dum," Carol explained. "One for my bottom, the other for your knobby knees."

Barry scooped two of the pillows from the bed as he sat up.

"Sshhh," Carol warned him. "If you wake Bobby up, he'll have to go to the bathroom."

"By all things bright and beautiful," Barry sighed, crumpling the pillows next to his sides. "Now I'm supposed to perform with the thought that as I'm peaking, the kid will be pounding on the bathroom door."

"C'mon, Barry," Carol teased. "You once said you wanted to make love to me in as many different places as possible—on the beach, in a museum, on a freeway, in a boat. So we've never had us a quickie on the bathroom floor of a motel. And if you say that *you* have," she shook a small but threatening fist under his nose, "then forget the whole thing!"

Barry shook his head in wonder. "The things a guy will do to get laid!"

The ringing of the telephone two feet from his

right ear startled Barry into only a half-complete wakefulness. It took one more ring of the bell to convince him that he was not dreaming, yet another to remind him that he was not in his own bed but in a rented bed at the McCormick Inn.

He picked up the receiver and propped himself up on an elbow. He was awake enough now to notice that Carol and Bobby were not with him. He managed a glance at his wristwatch. It was nearly ten o'clock.

"Barry," it was David Little Turtle's voice. "This is Little Turtle."

"What's happening?" Barry asked so that David would know that he was awake.

"Just wanted you to know that we checked out the burial mound in your backyard. The Sharps rifle is there, so are the pots that Cal and Carlos had taken. And something else was there, too."

"Yeah?" Barry scowled at the receiver.

"Moon Bear's Medicine bag. Cal drove over to Jake Hardesty's and found his place torn all to hell. Just like Carlos's place, I guess. Only the Medicine bag was missing, near as Cal could tell, but every pot and artifact was smashed or ripped to shreds."

"What about Cal's place?" Barry asked, visualizing the wall covered with western Americana.

"Nothing," Little Turtle replied. "I figure that's because Cal surrendered the things he had taken to the *Chindi* out there in the mountains last night. If the *Chindi* had had to come after them, it would have ripped his place apart, too."

"So that means everything is back in the mound but the skeleton," Barry noted.

"Right on, *Kemosabe*," Little Turtle agreed. "That is why the *Chindi* will most certainly pay a visit to Fredericks tonight. It must get those bones back."

Barry stifled a yawn. Damn, Carol should have been back from wherever she and Bobby had gone. God, he had to get some coffee.

"We're gonna have to be there tonight to head the *Chindi* off at the pass," Little Turtle said.

Barry imagined a mountain lion walking on its hind legs, eyes dead, emitting a horrible screaming roar.

He pictured the ripping talons and beaks of swooping, attacking desert owls and giant bats.

He felt pure, unleavened fear chill his body. He did not know if he were up to a personal encounter with an animal possessed by the *Chindi*.

And what if Little Turtle's magic couldn't stop it?

"Don got nowhere with Professor Fredericks," Barry reminded David.

"We must," Little Turtle said simply, "or we can all say good-bye to the professor. You must come with us tonight, because you are the rightful owner of the bones, according to white-man's law."

Barry wondered if his fear and reluctance were that obvious to Little Turtle.

"Of course I'm coming with you," Barry said, trying his best to make the assertion sound firm and unhesitant.

"Good." Little Turtle seemed pleased for the personal confirmation. "Cal is coming, too. He and Professor Fredericks have a begrudging respect for one another, so Hawkins's presence will be a definite asset."

"How are Cal, Carlos, and Jake?"

"Jake will lose one eye," Little Turtle came right out with it. "Carlos had to have quite a few stitches, but he's okay. And his wife is resting well now, too."

"Oh, yeah, Elena." Barry felt a flash of guilt for not including her in his request for an inventory of wounds. "I'm glad she's doing better. And Cal and Don?"

"Cal had some stitches, nothing serious. Don is pretty stiff and sore today, but he had me up at dawn. He's going to stay with me until he finishes his business here in Phoenix," David told him.

"Hey, that's really good of you, David," Barry smiled his pleasure. "That dump he was staying in was strictly from hunger."

"But it beat total hell out of what a lot of reservation Indians are living in across the length and breadth of this fine nation, Barry," David said quickly. Then, having made the social comment, he touched back on the mission that lay ahead for them. "Can you swing by here by seven?"

Barry nodded absently, then converted the thought to words: "Sure. I'll be there."

"We want to get to Fredericks's place before dark, of course," Little Turtle reminded him.

Carol was letting herself into the room. In her free hand she juggled a small tray with a carafe of coffee, a cup, cream, and sugar.

"Amen to that, David," Barry agreed. "I'll see you tonight."

"Amen to what?" Carol wanted to know as she set the tray down on the bedside stand. She leaned forward, and pecked Barry on the lips. "Wasn't it great last night?" she smiled seductively. "Bruised knees and all."

Barry reached up to catch the back of her neck and pull her to him for a much deeper kiss than the perfunctory peck.

"Yes, it most certainly was great," he said, loving the taste of her lipstick and the smell of her perfume. "And the 'amen' was for our arriving at Professor Fredericks's home before dark."

Carol poured half of the carafe into a cup and handed it to Barry.

"Thanks," Barry smiled. "Some service. Aren't you having any?"

"Had mine when I had breakfast with Bobby," she answered. "I watched Bobby in the pool for a while, then I had another cup while I was picking this up for you at the cafeteria. I also had an offer to play

golf and an offer to play tennis from two very persistent men."

Barry felt an unpleasant pang of jealousy. The smile of contentment faded quickly from his lips.

Although he could honestly say that he had never seen any evidence of infidelity from his wife, there seemed to be an aura about her—apart from her obvious physical beauty—that always prompted advances from men.

Barry always felt extreme resentment in such instances. He could not imagine his approaching a woman who was a stranger to him and suggesting that they go together to the tennis courts, the golf links, or the bed. Yet men seemed always to be issuing such invitations to his wife.

"Did you tell them that we would be happy to join them?" Barry said, hoping to make a joke of the men who had just propositioned Carol. "Did you tell them that your husband was a terror on the tennis courts? And that his hobby was breaking the arms of men who 'hit' on his wife?"

Carol smiled, enjoying her husband's discomfort. "I sent them on their way with a haughty glare," she reassured him, now that she had approved the evidence of his jealousy, and, thereby, his continued interest in her. For some reason she seemed to require a steady assortment of clues, both subtle and overt, that Barry's love for her retained itself at a high-energy rate.

She placed a soft, affectionate hand on Barry's shoulder and began to massage the tendons at the side of his neck. "Must you go along to Fredericks's tonight?"

"They want me there as the rightful owner of the skeleton. They figure Fredericks cannot refuse to return the skeleton if I am there in person."

"But why not write another letter?" Carol asked.

The warm-weather dress she wore was low and displayed a tantalizing cleavage. Barry could see why she

had received the sexual advances euphemistically disguised as invitations to sports activities.

"Why not leave everything to Don Red Fox and David Little Turtle now? They're the experts."

Barry sipped at his coffee. "They are indeed the experts, but I am the owner of the bones."

He set the cup down so that he might add some sweetener. "God," he sniggered as he ripped open the small envelope of sugar. "It sounds like some bizarre minstrel show, doesn't it? I am the owner of the bones. I am Mr. Bones! I am Mr. Bones! Jeez, I'll bring a tambourine along tonight. Maybe Red Fox plays banjo!"

Carol traced a forefinger through the little mat of hair on his chest. "I'd be scared, too, darling," she said gently, soothingly. "I'd be scared going along tonight, too. Please be careful."

Twenty-Seven



Because he was the kind of man who liked to dally, to stop at roadside fruit stands, to check out the curios at every new antique shop he spotted, Professor Carl Fredericks was nearly two hours later getting home than the time that he had told his wife, Margaret, to expect him. It was eight thirteen. It had been dark for half an hour.

Cal Hawkins, David Little Turtle, Don Red Fox, and Barry Jacobs had been sitting, silent and awkward, awaiting Fredericks in the front room of his home. They had been there since seven thirty.

Margaret Fredericks had served them coffee and tried to make pleasant small talk with them. She was uncertain of her role as hostess to such a unique assortment of men.

Fredericks was humming some unrecognizable tune as he came in his front door. He was carrying a stack of 1940s western pulp magazines against his protruding stomach. Fredericks was apparently an inveterate collector of anything to do with the American frontier, and he had obviously been pleased with his discovery of the batch of old magazines at some antique dealer's.

Both the little tune that he was humming and the

large smile of accomplishment which he was baring for his wife's appreciation vanished instantly from his lips the moment he saw the uninvited, unanticipated committee sitting in his front room.

Cal Hawkins got to his feet, crossed the room with his hand extended to be clasped, although it was readily discernable that Fredericks could not shake hands while he bore the stack of magazines.

"Howdy, Carl, you old bull moose," Hawkins tried for congeniality.

Fredericks set the magazines down on the end table, but he was still not interested in shaking hands.

"Margaret," he rumbled accusingly, "for what reason in God's earth did you allow these men to enter our house?"

Margaret Fredericks shrugged her confusion. Cal Hawkins had talked their way into her home with his folksy charm. "Well," she pleaded in her defense, "I've often heard you speak of Mr. Hawkins. And . . . and Mr. Little Turtle is a famous artist . . ."

Fredericks scowled, his thick eyebrows hunching over his narrowed eyes like two guard dogs crouching over their masters. "So Mr. Little Turtle is," he conceded. "I've admired your work, David Little Turtle. Some of it anyway. I don't like your modernistic stuff, but your traditional work is excellent."

Little Turtle waved. "Thanks, I guess," he smiled at the compliment mixed with criticism.

"But those other two," Fredericks snorted, pointing an unusually large forefinger in an accusing arrow toward Red Fox and Jacobs, "they come to bring me grief, my dear."

Margaret shifted uneasily in her chair in front of a large painting of Custer's Last Stand. Had she been sitting here serving coffee and making idle small talk with men who had come to upset her husband?

"The Native American there is Don Red Fox, a meddling Mesquakie from I-o-way, whom I ordered out of my office just yesterday. The Anglo greenhorn

sitting next to him is Barry Jacobs, who has obviously come to support Red Fox's demand that I return a skeleton that Mr. Jacobs previously summoned me to collect from his property."

Fredericks shook his head slowly, still ignoring Hawkins's proffered hand, which Cal was slowly lowering to his side. "I don't figure why the hell you're here, Cal. Little Turtle, I can guess. But why are you, of all people, throwing in with these loonies?"

"Carl, I found out last night that what they're talking about, no matter how damn Dark Ages it sounds, is true," Cal told him.

Fredericks arched a shaggy eyebrow as he fished in his shirt pocket for a cigar. "Don't tell me Red Fox managed to snow you with some Injun mumbo jumbo. Come on, man, you're too intelligent to swallow a story about an avenging *Chindi*."

Cal unbuttoned the mother-of-pearl snaps on his sleeve, and rolled up the blue fabric to display a forearm crisscrossed with stitches. "I got a bunch more on my chest. They were put there by a mountain lion that walked on its hind legs, Carl. A mountain lion with dead eyes."

Fredericks was slowly denuding the cigar of its cellophane wrapper. The eyebrow was still arched, but he was listening.

"Carlos Dominquez, my best buddy on earth, has dozens of stitches in his arms, chest, and legs," Cal continued. "Ol' Jake Hardesty lost one eye to a giant bat. Both of their places were smashed all to hell. Elena Dominquez is in shock and still at Scottsdale Memorial."

Margaret Fredericks got to her feet and crossed the room to stand at her husband's side. "What are these men talking about, Carl?"

Her eyes were wide and frightened behind her glasses. "What is Mr. Hawkins referring to? A mountain lion on hind legs attacking him and all?"

Fredericks had the cigar in his mouth, and he

thumbnailed a kitchen match into flame to apply to the end of the tobacco. He inhaled deeply, then exhaled in noisy, rhythmic puffs. The professor appeared momentarily at a loss for words.

"I didn't believe none of this neither," Cal was telling him. "Me and the boys picked up Red Fox at his place last night. He told us that he and Jacobs and Little Turtle were going out to see you to warn you, but we didn't listen. We believed that he was responsible for what had happened to Sam and Merry and Ramon and Gooch. We didn't know how he had managed those murders, but we gave him the choice of telling us or we would beat him to a pulp."

Cal paused to permit Fredericks time for response, but the professor retained his silence, seeming to concentrate as much on his cigar as on Hawkins's account of the previous evening's events.

"Red Fox kept telling us that a *Chindi* was the thing that was doing all the killing, but we kept telling him to make his peace or make his confession," Cal said. "We took him out past Apache Junction, took him out of the car. Jake was just starting to hide him with the bullwhip when the biggest goddamn bat in Arizona swooped down and gouged out Jake's left eye. We no sooner dealt with that sonuvabitchin' monster when a mountain lion on its hind legs came after us. Red Fox saved our skins by making some magic Injun circle."

Fredericks glanced over at Don, grunted something unintelligible around his cigar.

"In short, Professor Fredericks," David Little Turtle spoke up, "the *Chindi* is definitely for real. It is deadly. It is single-minded in its intent. It will be coming here tonight for the skeleton of Moon Bear. You must hand it over to us at once."

Carl Fredericks removed the cigar from between his lips. "You mothers are all crazy. And probably dangerous, too."

"We ain't crazy, Carl," Hawkins told him. "But the *Chindi* is dangerous as hell!"

Fredericks expanded his barrel chest and glowered at each of them in turn. "I don't believe any of this dogshit. And, Cal, I find it difficult to believe that you do."

"My stitches help me to believe, man," Cal said. "And the memory of that mountain lion with the dead eyes is going to be with me for a long time to come. So is the look on Elena Dominquez's face when we found her cowering against a wall last night, half of her furniture smashed around her."

"I don't know what the hell is going on," Carl belted, "but you can have the goddamn bones. And then I want each of you bastards to get the hell out of my life!"

Don Red Fox got quickly to his feet and broke the silence that he had judiciously maintained. "Where is the skeleton, Professor? It has been dark for nearly an hour. We have no time to lose."

"It's in the garage!" Margaret Fredericks blurted. "Take it. Please take it and go!"

She fell against the bulk of her husband, and he moved a heavy arm around her thin shoulders. Margaret Fredericks began to cry softly.

"You turkeys have done a goddamn good job of upsetting my wife," Fredericks growled. "I ought to call the cops. Have you all charged with breaking and entering, threatening physical violence, disturbing the peace..."

"We ain't done none of those things, Carl," Cal silenced his complaints. "All we done is come here to save your fat, stubborn ass."

"Come on," Fredericks sighed as if he were the only sane man in the asylum. "I fixed up a workshop in the garage where I work on things away from the campus."

Red Fox suddenly stumbled against Barry and gave a strangled shout.

Barry caught Red Fox under the arms, supported his sagging weight.

"Now what the hell?" Fredericks wondered in disgust.

Red Fox began to inhale in a series of short, sharp breaths, and his eyes rolled back in their sockets.

"Is the sonuvabitch epileptic?" Fredericks asked, his jaws clamped rigidly around the cigar.

"He's going into trance," Barry answered. "Moon Bear must want to speak through him. Someone help me lay him on the couch."

"Enough already," Fredericks said, shaking his head emphatically from side to side. "I don't need any goddamn trances in this house. My wife certainly doesn't need any goddamn trances. Come on, you cretins! I'm giving you the fucking bones. Take them and get out of my house without any more redskin crap. I'm warning you . . ."

Red Fox began to thrash violently on the couch as the energy of Moon Bear moved into his body. Then the familiar reedy voice of Moon Bear spoke out: "*I am in the Medicine brother's body.*"

"That's Moon Bear speaking now," Barry informed them.

"That's Indian bullshit we're hearing," Fredericks pronounced with grim finality. "I'm calling the police."

"*It is too late,*" Moon Bear said. "*The Thing that is No Thing has come.*"

There was a very loud scratching at the back door. Barry felt prickles of fear ice his spine.

"Jesus," Cal whispered. "What the hell is that?"

"*The Chindi,*" Moon Bear said. "*It has come.*"

"*Chindi,* my ass," Fredericks snorted. "That's my dog scratching at the back door. Probably hears all the ruckus in here. Thor is a German shepherd," Fredericks smirked. "He weighs damn near a hundred pounds. A big brute of a dog. Shall I let him in so he can start chewing ass?"

"Don't go near that door!" Little Turtle shouted. He hefted a buckskin bag from his belt. "I have sacred sand. I will draw the medicine circle."

There was the sound of wood splintering.

A terrible howling scream tore at their ears, touching dark, atavistic fears in each of them. Even Fredericks appeared momentarily startled by the intensity of the piercing howl.

"Christ Almighty," Fredericks gasped.

Margaret clutched at her husband's solid frame and shouted: "That's not Thor! That dog has never in ten years let out a sound like that!"

Little Turtle was busy pouring a thin trickle of sand in the front room.

"Stop that, you ignorant savage!" Fredericks roared above the din of his wife's growing hysteria. "Stop pouring that sand on my carpet!"

"This savage has a master's degree, Professor," Little Turtle snapped. "Now bring your wife over here and stand in the circle while I begin the chant that will . . ."

The back door shattered in an explosion of splintering wood and nightmarish snarling.

The faithful German shepherd had been transformed into a dead-eyed, hideously growling monster. It was walking erect, treading resolutely on its hindlegs.

"Into the circle!" Little Turtle shouted.

Cal complied instantly, but it was too late for Fredericks. The possessed Thor had thrown its hundred pounds behind furiously snapping jaws aimed for his master's throat.

Fredericks managed to get an arm between the cruel teeth and his jugular vein, but he fell backward under the force of the attack. His wife was thrown against a wall by the onslaught, and she slumped to the floor, screaming hysterically.

Little Turtle began a chant, a high-pitched keening

wail. He appeared as though he had entered an altered state of consciousness.

Cal stood in the protective Medicine circle, his mouth opening and closing fitfully. Barry was astonished to see that the rugged westerner was weeping.

Carl Fredericks shouted for help, threshing his thick body about, thudding his heavy legs up and down on the floor. Blood spurted from the jagged arm that he desperately sought to hold between his throat and the snapping, angry jaws.

Barry found himself easing Red Fox to the carpet. He took a deep breath, then picked up a wooden chair. He crossed to Fredericks in four large steps and brought the chair down across the big dog with all the strength that he could muster.

It was hard enough to spin the shepherd off the man, but now, erect on its hind legs, it advanced toward Barry.

Barry was mesmerized by the dead eyes, by the very horror of what was approaching him. He tightened his grip on the chair, his only weapon against the relentless terror that was baring dangerously sharp teeth in massive jaws that could damn near snap a grown man's neck. Perhaps with the strength of the *Chindi* possessing them, they could do so with little effort.

Out of the corner of his eye Barry could see Fredericks trying to get to his feet. He flopped helplessly against a wall, his mangled arm splashing blood across its surface in bold arcs.

Then he heard Red Fox joining Little Turtle in the chant.

The *Chindi* slowed its advance. Sweet and gentle Jesus, Barry prayed, was the chant working?

The dead eyes were rolling in the big dog's skull. The flesh of its muzzle was peeled back in a grotesque snarl. But the shepherd had stopped moving toward him. It seemed somehow to be in suspended animation.

"Go get the skeleton, Barry!" Little Turtle told him. Red Fox continued with the chant, and Barry didn't want Little Turtle to repeat himself just in case it took both of them singing the Medicine song to keep the *Chindi* at bay. As if such might be true, Little Turtle resumed chanting immediately after issuing the order to Barry.

Barry kept the chair in front of him as he moved around the erect German shepherd. Margaret and Carl were leaning against the same wall, only a few feet apart. Margaret was still sobbing and intermittently screaming, but Fredericks simply stared blankly into some undefined space before him.

Barry headed for the garage and found what had to be the proper door. He touched a light switch on the wall beside the jamb, then opened the door. The two-car garage had been converted into a veritable museum, stocked from floor to ceiling with an amazing variety of American Indian artifacts. The skeleton lay on a workbench against the opposite wall, the hollow-eyed skull grinning its eternal frozen joke.

Barry swallowed his persistent revulsion to dead things and began placing the assortment of bones into a canvas sack he found crumpled in a heap beside the bench.

Fredericks had separated the skeleton as if he were intent on making a grisly jigsaw puzzle of it. Barry noticed a spool of thin, black wire next to the skull, and guessed that the professor had planned to bind the bones together to make a more permanent museum display trophy.

When he returned with the canvas sack of skeletal fragments, the shepherd was still suspended in its private limbo. Red Fox and Little Turtle continued to chant the Medicine song, but they both pantomimed that Barry should drop the sack near the feet of the big dog.

The moment the sack touched the floor, Little

Turtle and Red Fox stopped singing. The German shepherd shuddered, whined, then dropped to the carpet as if it had been poleaxed.

Barry had guessed what would happen next. The entire room seemed to be alive with a peculiar, electrical kind of energy. Two fine Mimbres pots on the fireplace mantel shattered. A finely worked Navajo vase crumbled in a small explosion.

The powerful energy left the front room so quickly that Barry felt his knees buckle, as if the sudden withdrawal had created a vortex.

He jerked fully upright in alarm as he heard a terrible, screaming howl from the garage he had just left. He heard pottery crashing against the walls so rapidly that the steady thudding and smashing sounds began to blend together like a roar of thunder.

And then the energy was back with them in the front room. At first the energy seemed to be humming, then, as it raised its frequency, to be howling. Barry gaped his astonishment as a swirling black cloud began to materialize over the canvas sack of bones.

"Gawd Almighty!" he heard Cal Hawkins gasp.

The canvas sack was elevated, spinning and jerking as if it were an animated creature performing some bizarre dance.

In the next instant the sack and the swirling, dark wind were crashing through the Frederickses' picture window and soaring out of sight into the night sky.

Cal Hawkins left the circle and hurried to Carl Fredericks. "Don't worry, you old bull moose," he said as he knelt beside the man and squeezed his shoulder reassuringly. "We'll have us an ambulance here pronto!"

Margaret's head had slumped forward on her chest, and she was making small, whimpering sounds.

"I don't know what Scottsdale Memorial is going to say," Red Fox observed wryly. "It'll be the second

night in a row that I have brought in a woman in shock."

"We'll let Cal see to them and call the ambulance," Little Turtle said. "We must now act very, very fast. As you have explained it to me, the *Chindi* has now collected all the artifacts. Is that correct?"

"That is correct," Don verified. "And now it has the skeleton."

"Yes," Little Turtle nodded. "It has completed its mission. It has done what it was created to do."

Barry hoped that he was understanding all that was being said. "Do you mean the *Chindi* is now at rest? The incredible nightmare is now over?"

"The nightmare is over," Little Turtle said. "The *Chindi* is at rest. Now we must remove everything from your backyard."

"Oh, God love you," Barry sighed deeply. "Do you think you can manage that?"

Little Turtle nodded. "Because its mission is now completed, the *Chindi* will return to whatever place between worlds in which it slumbers. By the time we drive from Tempe to Pinnacle Peak and your backyard, the *Chindi* will have already deposited the skeleton on the mound and have sunk into limbo."

"There's no more danger from the *Chindi*?" Barry wanted total verification.

"Not now," Little Turtle assured him. "It has completed its mission. All skeletal remains and burial artifacts have been returned."

"So how are you going to transplant everything from my backyard?" Barry asked. "I mean, you don't want it to get pissed off again."

Little Turtle smiled. "The *Chindi* slumbers, Barry. We will now put everything, skeleton and all, into a car and quickly drive to Window Rock where the Navajo have some consecrated land."

"I shall conduct a respectful burial ritual for Moon Bear at the first rays of the morning sun. I shall ask powerful Navajo healers to participate in the ceremo-

ny with me, and they will assure the *Chindi* that all is well, that it may now release all of its energy and return to the secret places. They will tell it that it has been absolved of its assignment to guard Moon Bear until the Navajo healer returned. Powerful Navajo Medicine doctors will tell it this."

"Why must all this be done before dawn tomorrow?" Barry could not quite understand.

"It is the best time," Little Turtle said simply. "Will you come with us?"

Barry glanced from Little Turtle to Red Fox and shook his head. "No, you two are the experts in this sort of thing. I certainly couldn't contribute anything."

Little Turtle offered no comment. Instead he looked at his wristwatch.

"It is nine seventeen. If we leave now," he said to Red Fox, "we will have time to pick up the skeleton and the burial gifts. We will have time to drive to Window Rock, summon the Medicine doctors, and prepare Moon Bear's new resting place. When we have made proper burial, he will be able to go to the Land of the Grandfathers and Grandmothers. But we must leave now if we are to do it all in the best way."

Red Fox nodded. "Let us do it in the best way. Let us leave now."

"We came in your car, Barry," Little Turtle reminded him. "If you will take us quickly to my house so that we might pick up my car, then accompany us to your home and unlock your gate for us, we will load everything into my trunk and be gone to Window Rock before eleven."

Barry reached in his pocket for his keys. "I really appreciate you two doing this for me."

Red Fox smiled. "For you, of course, Barry. For Carol, for Bobby. But perhaps most of all we are doing this for Moon Bear. His spirit self has been in torment for too long."

"I understand," Barry said quietly after a moment

of reflection. "Or to be honest I will say that someday soon I hope to understand."

Red Fox gripped him warmly on the shoulder. "You will, brother," he promised. "You will."

"The ambulance should be here any minute," Cal Hawkins reported. "I got both Carl and his Mrs. covered with blankets, and I wrapped a towel around Carl's arm."

A high-pitched dog's whine caused the four men to look quickly over their shoulders. Thor had regained consciousness and was expressing intense canine concern over the condition of his master and mistress.

Margaret began screaming again as the German shepherd approached her.

"I better get that dog out of here," Cal said, turning on his heel to remove the big dog from the room.

Carl made a deep, croaking sound that managed, after a few abortive attempts, to fashion itself into recognizable words. "Don't cry, Margaret. That was not Thor that hurt me. Something came over him."

Fredericks paused, swallowed, then forced himself to say, as much in apology to Red Fox as in acknowledgment of a greater reality beyond the parameters of his academic dogma, "I . . . guess I still have a lot to learn."

Twenty-Eight



At four minutes to midnight Barry walked into their room at the McCormick Inn and told Carol that the nightmare had ended. The skeletal remains of Moon Bear, together with all of his artifacts, had been reclaimed by the *Chindi*, and now all those funeral gifts and dry bones were on their way to Navajo land for sacred burial. Barry spared her the details of the horror that had transpired at the Fredericks's home.

Then Carol said something that pleased him very much. He had already slipped off his shoes, stretched out on the bed, when she asked him why he was making himself so comfortable.

"Let's go home," she smiled broadly. "We've got a wonderful new waterbed that we've barely initiated. Isn't it ridiculous to be staying in a motel when we have a hundred-thousand-dollar home sitting vacant less than twenty minutes away?"

Barry enthusiastically agreed that it was indeed ridiculous to do so, especially now that their backyard had been thoroughly exorcised by Don and David. Moon Bear and the *Chindi* were being taken far, far away from the Jacobses' newly won homestead in Pinnacle Peak.

At six minutes after one Barry wheeled their Olds-

mobile Cutlass into the driveway of their home. He propped the sleeping Bobby into a sitting position, then cradled him in his arms and carried him directly to his own bedroom. Carol pulled back the sheets, and Barry slipped the boy into bed as smoothly and as efficiently as if they had rehearsed the maneuver for hours.

At twenty-three minutes after one they began making love. Although they both claimed to be on the verge of exhaustion, the hunger had suddenly come upon them.

They left a trail of discarded clothing across their bedroom floor and fell across the waterbed in each other's arms. They made love slowly, then settled into that beautiful pattern of gentle thrusts and loving yieldings that seemed reserved for master lovers.

Afterward they held each other in a close embrace, and Carol fell asleep.

Barry lay still for several minutes, but sleep would not come to him. His fatigued, but excited, brain would occasionally flash vivid images of the *Chindi* advancing toward him with its dead eyes, its snarling, bared fangs.

Carefully, gently, he eased himself from Carol's arms and swung his bare feet over the side of the bed. He retrieved his pajama bottoms from across a chair and pulled the loose cloth legs over his own.

He decided that a beer or two in the kitchen would help him relax and make sleep a greater possibility than lying wide-eyed and restless next to his softly snoring wife. Carol often made that little nasal-throat purr that sounded so much like he was sleeping next to a giant cat.

Barry wedged his toes into his slippers and padded quietly across the carpeted bedroom to the hallway. Bobby's door was just slightly ajar, and he could not resist the impulse to look in on the boy.

Barry pushed the door open with his fingertips and smiled at the shadowed image in the glow of a Super-

man nightlight. Bobby's hair had rooster-tailed out across his pillow, and he was sleeping on his back with his mouth open. A small buzzing sound was escaping in rhythm with the rise and fall of his thin chest.

Barry yawned, moving away from the door. He was glad that Carol and Bobby had been spared the sight of the dead-eyed German shepherd moving on its hind legs to leap at Professor Fredericks's throat.

He walked to the kitchen and leaned against the refrigerator with his left hand as he opened its door with his right. He slid a tray forward and plucked out a can of Budweiser.

The tab popped open, sounding like a pistol shot in the quiet of the sleeping house. Barry winced, gritted his teeth, sucked in air as though he could somehow pull back the sudden noise.

Much more cautious now he moved a wooden chair away from the round kitchen table and sat down on its flat pillow cushion. The Budweiser was cold, refreshing, just what he needed.

Barry sipped at the beer and felt a renewed stirring of passion in his groin as he idly reviewed their just completed lovemaking session. "Hey there, man," he grinned at his reflection in the kitchen window. "You are incorrigible. A goddamn sex fiend, an animal."

Nonetheless he knew that his wife slept naked across the bed, and he felt a strong glandular urging to roll her over in the clover and do it again.

But then an ambivalence toward the act permeated his consciousness. What if he awakened Carol from a deep sleep, got her stimulated, then lost the erection? After all, he was really very fatigued, and they had made love both last night and tonight.

Barry was in the process of opening the refrigerator door to pick out another cold beer when he heard Carol whimpering in the bedroom. Puzzled, of course, but primarily concerned with his wife's well-being, he closed the door and returned to the master bedroom.

Carol was twisting her shoulders against the bladder of the waterbed's mattress, causing ripples in the rumpled sheets that made their bed look like a miniature ocean.

"What is it, babe?" he asked, his hands caressing her shoulders and back as he cradled her in his arms.

Carol's eyes were wide with confusion and distress. She clutched at Barry's arms with surprising strength in the fingers that curled into his flesh.

"It was sitting on my chest," she said in an explosive rush of words.

"What was?" Barry asked in that inquisitive tone one reserves for imaginative children and adults waking from bad dreams.

"God," Carol gasped, "I don't know. But whatever it was, it was hideous."

"What else about the dream do you remember?"

"I don't remember any part of any dream."

"Do you remember our fantastic lovemaking session?" Barry smiled, lightly stroking the top of one of her nipples.

Carol nodded and managed a fleeting smile. "Yes, it was beautiful."

Barry bent down and kissed her lips softly. "Then why don't you concentrate on those glorious moments and fall back asleep."

"Why weren't you in bed?" Carol asked. "I reached over for you, but you weren't there."

"I'm a bit restless, honey," he answered. "I'm having a beer in the kitchen. Want to join me?"

Carol shook her head, her eyes were staring, trance-like, over Barry's shoulder. "I remember a bit more now," she said. "I remember that I was swimming in our pool."

"Terrific," Barry chuckled. "I'm glad you're getting some use out of the pool in your dreams, since only Bobby has been in it."

It was as if Carol did not hear the interruption. "I was swimming in our pool, and I heard something

calling to me from inside the burial mound. It was a strange voice that was calling my name over and over. I got out of the pool, walked over to the opening in the mound to see what was in there."

"How brave you are," Barry teased.

"Oh, I was frightened," Carol admitted. "But it was as if I were being drawn to the mound. It was like I was hypnotized."

"What happened then?"

Carol shuddered, and her teeth came forward to chew at her lower lip. "I was bending over to look into the hole in the mound when something jumped out of the opening and knocked me down on my back. I screamed for you to get it away from me."

"What was it?"

Carol shook her head. "I don't know, but it was awful. I mean, it was as though I couldn't really see clearly what it was, but I could sense that it was ugly and evil. It seemed to be very dark in color and covered with thick, bristly hair. It had terrible-smelling breath, and it was panting horribly."

"And it sat on your chest?" Barry frowned his discomfort, getting caught up in the dream.

"Yes," Carol nodded. "It was really terrible, and I was very frightened. I kept calling out for you. Did I actually call out for you? I mean, out loud?"

Barry squeezed her hand with his own. "You were making some whimpering sounds. I came to see what was wrong."

Carol kissed the back of his hand. "It's that damn *Chindi* business, isn't it?"

"I suppose," Barry agreed. "I imagine that that living nightmare is going to be invading our dreams for some time to come. It's only natural, you know, after people go through a terrible or traumatic experience that they will have bad dreams about it."

"And we certainly went through a terrible and traumatic experience," Carol sighed.

"Yes," Barry chuckled. "And who would believe us?"

You know, that's one of the most frustrating things about this whole insane affair. Other people survive some incredible ordeal, and they get to brag about it to the newspapers."

"Or go on radio and television talk shows," Carol added, following her husband's complaint.

Barry made a face of disgust and frustration. "We have experienced the kind of thing that a dozen horror movies have been made of, and we wouldn't be able to get six people in Phoenix to believe us. But we're probably going to have nightmares about the damn experience for years to come."

Carol moved her nude body very close to his. "Come to bed and hold me," she asked in a small, childish voice.

Barry caressed her hair. "Come to the kitchen and have a beer with me. Then I'll come to bed and hold you."

"I don't want any beer," she told him. "You go get your beer and bring it in here with me."

"That's the winning compromise," Barry winked. "I'll be right back."

Barry left the bed, walked to the door, and turned to deliver a warning before he left for the kitchen. "Don't let anything crawl back on your chest!"

"Does that include you?" Carol wanted to know.

"Anything *except* me!" Barry amended his admonition.

Barry was about to open the refrigerator door when the kitchen phone rang, startling him.

"My God," he frowned, glancing at the electric clock on the oven. "It's five minutes after three. Who the hell . . ."

He swept the receiver off its hook, gave the caller a much louder "hello" than was necessary.

"Barry, is everything all right there!" It was David Little Turtle's voice, urgent, almost strident.

Barry blinked his surprise. "David, you're sup-

posed to be getting ready to bury Moon Bear's bones."

"That's true," David conceded, "but there's been a slight change of plans. Listen to me now and try not to interrupt. We were almost to Heber when Don started getting restless, started to complain that something was wrong. Then Moon Bear came through Don and told me that I must turn back. I wanted to know why, and Moon Bear said that his medallion was missing."

"His medallion?" Barry had an image of Bobby, his lips in full angry pout, returning the medallion so that Red Fox could place it with the artifacts on Moon Bear's burial mound. "The medallion was there."

"Moon Bear insisted, speaking through Don, that it was not with the other belongings. Moon Bear said that your boy took it back from the mound."

Barry felt sweat moistening the hair under his arms. His free hand came up to rake nervous fingers across his forehead. "Bobby wouldn't disobey like that," he mumbled more in hope than in certainty.

"He must have, Barry," David said. "I stopped the car, got out, and looked in the trunk. There is no medallion with the rest of the things."

"Well," Barry's mind was churning, "well, what should we do? I mean, do you think Bobby has it?"

"When Don came out of trance, he insisted that we turn around and head back to your place," Little Turtle said. "We are outside of Sunflower right now. With luck we'll be there in less than an hour."

"But Moon Bear's burial," Barry reminded him. "You said it should take place at sunrise."

"Barry, get it together, man," David said firmly. "If your kid has that medallion, we cannot yet bury Moon Bear in sacred ground. If your kid has that medallion, then that means the *Chindi* still has a mission and we cannot yet dispel its energy!"

"Oh, Jesus," Barry hissed, permitting his first fear

to come into full consciousness. "Then you think the *Chindi* could come here, to our house!"

"Maybe the *Chindi* won't bother with something so inconsequential as a single medallion," David said, offering Barry some hope. "But we feel that we can't take that chance. We feel we must know. Moon Bear said that he will wait another sunrise to enter the Land of the Grandfathers and Grandmothers."

Barry slumped weakly against the wall next to the telephone. He had a vivid image of the German shepherd walking on its hind legs, grotesquely possessed, tearing at Fredericks's throat.

"Barry!" David shouted into the mouthpiece. "You hang on, man. We'll be there as fast as we can!"

Barry needed that beer now, badly. He pulled off the tab and poured cold Budweiser down his throat as he headed for his chair at the kitchen table.

He had to pull himself together before he told Carol. He had to have some kind of plan if the *Chindi* came to them. Thank God, they didn't own a German shepherd or a Doberman or even a goddamn beagle!

Jesus, why hadn't he paid better attention when David Little Turtle was teaching Don to make the magic circle? But then there was no way that he could have learned that Navajo chant.

But he had learned *something* about the *Chindi* that would help them now.

Little Turtle had sent him to get the skeletal remains of Moon Bear from Fredericks's garage workshop. When he had set the skeleton before the *Chindi*, it had left the German shepherd, swooped up the bones, and spun away in the swirling black wind.

Barry sat rigidly upright as the full impact of the realization hit him. If Bobby had the medallion, all they had to do was get it from him and place it outside on the burial mound.

Barry emitted an enormous sigh of relief. They were really in no danger at all if he acted quickly.

It would be best to wake Carol before he disturbed Bobby. It was difficult to imagine Bobby having disobeyed and having reclaimed the medallion, but there was no time now to speculate on the boy's reasons for having done so.

Carol's back was turned to him, and she was breathing heavily. Damn! She appeared to have fallen asleep and was entering another bad dream.

Barry sat on the edge of the bed. "Carol," he said, touching his wife on the shoulder. "Carol, wake up."

There was no way that he could possibly have prepared himself for what happened next.

Carol's body turned toward him in a violent movement of sinewy strength as if she were a great, writhing serpent. Her face was contorted nearly beyond recognition, and her lips were peeled back over her teeth. Her mouth was open wider than Barry would have thought possible, and a terrible hissing roar was coming from deep within her throat.

And her eyes were dead, lifeless, like those on a mannequin.

Her nails reached out to rake across his chest, his face, his throat in great sweeping, deadly arcs.

Barry felt himself being thrown backward by the sudden violence of her charge. Tiny pinpoints of light swam before his eyes as the back of his skull struck the wall, and he fell to the floor.

She left him there, crumpled, dazed, and began to move toward the bedroom door.

Barry rolled over on one knee. It was as if a voice other than his own were shouting at him inside his head. The *Chindi* had entered Carol while she slept. It had been the *Chindi* that Carol had sensed crouching on her chest.

And now the *Chindi* was going for Bobby and the medallion.

Barry managed to throw a body block into Carol just as her clawed hand was reaching for the boy's bedroom door. The full weight of his body sent her

sprawling into the bathroom, but she was on her feet again with incredible catlike grace and balance.

Barry managed to get inside Bobby's room, but he was unable to close the door before the *Chindi* was forcing Carol's body against it.

Bobby sat up, his eyes blinking wide in bewilderment and fear. The howls coming from the other side of his door were beyond those he had ever heard on any television monster movie. The sight of his bloodied stepfather leaning his bare shoulder against that same door, obviously trying to keep something horrible from getting in, was enough to set him to cry out his fright and his confusion.

"Bobby!" Barry shouted over the roar of the *Chindi* and the boy's own screams. "Get the medallion! The medallion you took from the grave. Get it!"

The *Chindi* backed away from the door, and Barry quickly pushed it closed and turned the lock. He knelt beside Bobby's bed, took the boy's thin shoulders in his hands. "Where is the medallion?"

Bobby saw the open scratches on Barry's cheeks, the ragged rivulets of blood on his chest and shoulders. He heard the awful howling from the hallway.

"Where's Mommy?" he had to know at once. "Where's my mommy?"

Barry shook the boy in his desperation. "The medallion! Where did you put it?"

Bobby began to sob, his chest convulsing in spasmodic inhalations and exhalations.

"Your mother needs help!" Barry shouted. "Can't you understand? There is something on the other side of that door that will kill all of us unless you give it back the medallion!"

A loud, thudding sound rattled the door with tremendous force. Barry looked fearfully over his shoulder. These damn modern doors were nothing but laminated slices of wood glued to thin frames. The next blow shattered the center of the door.

Bobby grew strangely quiet. "Is it the Indian ghost?" he whispered, his tiny fists moving up to wipe the tears from the corners of his eyes.

Barry nodded. "Where's the medallion? We must give it back to the ghost at once."

"I hid it," Bobby said. "I hid it in my overshoe in the hall closet."

Barry's heart thudded against his throat. Why in God's name didn't the boy hide the thing in his own room?

The door was being systematically kicked and punched to splinters by his five-foot five, one-hundred-and-twenty-pound wife. But, of course, it wasn't really his wife now. It was the *Chindi*. And somehow they were going to have to get by it to reach the hall closet.

Carol's bloodied hand came through the thin door and began to tear chunks of wood out of the frame. Barry figured he had about six seconds to explain things to the boy.

"The ghost is inside your mother, Bobby. That is *not* your mother out there." Barry prayed the boy could receive some glimmer of understanding into this problem in advanced metaphysics that would baffle the most learned of men.

"I'll try to keep the ghost from you, and you run and get the medallion from your overshoe. Understand?"

Carol smashed through the door. Barry had hoped the medallion would have been in Bobby's room so that the boy might have been spared the sight of his mother possessed by the *Chindi*, her beautiful features contorted, her full, naked body an agent of destruction.

"Run, Bobby!" Barry commanded as he rose to meet the *Chindi's* charge.

Teeth and nails tore at his flesh, but Barry managed to hold his wife's body from the boy as Bobby

ran from the room. The strength pulsing through the lovely body in his arms was unbelievable.

Carol's jaws were snapping, seeking out his throat, his shoulders, his sides. Her hands and feet were bloodied by the force of their hammering against the door, but they did not stop in their perpetual striking and clawing at his body.

Barry tried desperately to pin her arms behind her back, but her strength was too great. He knew that he outweighed Carol by seventy pounds, but the energy that had possessed her drew upon powers that were primitive, animal, inexhaustible.

The fury of the unrelenting blows and bites at last forced Barry to stumble, to slip to one knee. A powerful backhand punch smashed his nose and knocked him to the floor.

Then the terror was on him, straddling his chest. Fingers entwined themselves in his hair. He felt his head being lifted, then slammed to the floor. A swirling splash of multicolored lights seemed to explode inside his brain.

Again and again Barry's head was hammered against the floor. Consciousness was slipping from him. Somehow he managed to strike the possessed body hard enough in the chest so that it fell from atop him.

Instinctively Barry backed into a corner. The *Chindi* crouched opposite him, breathing heavily.

Barry had tried his best to wrestle with the thing, but it was too powerful for him. He found it next to impossible to think of striking the beautiful woman with whom he had just made passionate love. How could he mutilate the lovely features of the one he loved most?

The lifeless, doll's eyes seemed to be regarding him carefully. Carol's head tilted from side to side, bird-like, considering her adversary.

Barry felt the wall against his back. Slowly, cau-

tiously, he began to stand. He wanted his full leverage when the *Chindi* sprang for him.

And looking at the lifeless green eyes in his wife's face, he had made up his mind to start punching. If he could knock her out, he could have the medallion on her chest before she regained consciousness. Then, the medallion in its grasp once again, the *Chindi* would leave her.

It would be much better to leave Carol with a bruise or a black eye than to jeopardize Bobby's life. And maybe his own life, the way those fingers kept going for his throat.

With a shrill scream of rage the *Chindi* catapulted Carol's body upon him. Barry threw all of his one hundred and ninety pounds behind the punch that caught Carol full in the face.

The blow made her teeter backward, but it did not stop her.

Another shrill cry of attack, another charge, another full face blow.

The awful truth occurred to Barry as Carol rocked backward for the second time. His punches had been well landed. Blood streamed from Carol's nose. There was a cut on her cheekbone. But, in essence, Carol was already unconscious. The *Chindi* was using only her body, hence the dead green eyes. Carol was not anywhere inside that naked body crouching before him. Some primeval force had invaded his wife's physical self; and since it was an energy, it could not be knocked unconscious. The only way to stop it would be to kill Carol.

"Barry!" Bobby shouted from the open frame of the splintered bedroom door. He held the medallion aloft.

A deep, throaty rumble issued from Carol, and she turned her attention to the boy.

"Toss it at your mother's feet!" Barry told him.

The dead eyes seemed to be carefully examining

the medallion now on the floor before them. Bobby crossed the room to clutch at Barry's knees.

"Please, dear God," Barry said through clenched teeth. "Please make the thing leave Carol."

In the split second before the *Chindi* animated Carol's body again and threw her at his throat, Barry knew the act of propitiation had been incomplete. There was no one here to sing the chant. There was no one here to draw the magic circle.

Bobby was crying piteously as his mother's hands were pressing, squeezing at Barry's throat. Barry joined his hands together, prepared to bring them up to break the *Chindi's* hold. The follow-through of the maneuver was then to bring the linked hands sharply down across the bridge of the assailant's nose. Such a blow could force the bridge into the brain, thereby causing the assailant's death.

Barry could not risk delivering such a blow. He brought his hands apart and swung them up to grip Carol's wrists. He would have to pry away the hands that were crushing his windpipe.

The fingers were inexorable in their application of steadily increasing pressure. Barry brought all of his strength against the wrists, putting all of his weight behind his own downward push.

But he could not budge the angry hands. He felt as though he were being mashed into the wall. He felt as though, at any second, his throat might be crushed, as effortlessly as he crumpled a beer can in his own hands.

They stood there, locked together, for what seemed an eternity. Barry had a mental image of their having been cast in bronze and set forever on display.

Barry's entire existence, his entire universe, was centered on those hands clamped about his throat. The muscles that strained against those hands were burning with the pain of unending tension.

The first sounds of the Navajo chant seemed to come from a great distance.

Barry found himself high on a ridge of stone, looking out over an awesomely beautiful canyon. The chant rose and fell and echoed off the canyon walls. Then he became an eagleman, soaring high into the clouds, moving toward the sun.

When Barry regained full consciousness, he was trying to swallow some of the coffee that Don Red Fox was attempting to force down his throat. Don was smiling. "I remembered where the coffeepot was," he said.

Barry was lying on his bed. Carol lay beside him, her naked body now discreetly covered with a sheet.

"Carol." Barry tried to sit up. The name had come out a warped squawk. His throat was aflame with pain.

"She's all right," David Little Turtle said. "And, thankfully, she's asleep right now."

Barry's eyes swept the room until they located Little Turtle seated before Carol's dressing table. Bobby was on his lap.

Barry put tentative fingers on his ravaged throat. "You . . . two," he managed, "saved our lives."

Red Fox shook his head. "Actually it was Moon Bear who saved you. If he hadn't come through me with the message that Bobby had taken the medallion, we never would have been able to make it back in time. In fact, we would have proceeded on to Window Rock and never been the wiser to the danger that you were in."

Barry smiled feebly. "Can you thank Moon Bear for us?"

"You'll have an opportunity to do that yourself," Little Turtle spoke up.

Barry propped himself up on his elbows. "How?" he wanted to know.

"Now that we have all the burial gifts, the belongings, and the bones properly assembled, we can still consecrate the ground and perform the ritual for

Moon Bear before dawn. That is," Little Turtle pulled back the window shade to glance outside, "if we hurry."

"Here?" Barry was certain that his eyes related the fear that he felt.

"There'll be no problem," Red Fox promised. "Moon Bear wants only to go to the Land of the Grandfathers and the Grandmothers, but he asked that his bones be given sacred burial right where they have lain for so long."

Barry considered this, then asked: "And the *Chindi*?"

"Its work is completed," Little Turtle said. "And Don and I will conduct a ritual that will bless it and return it to the *wakan*, the basic life force that exists in all things."

Just as the sun was casting first light over the desert, the five of them formed a small circle around the burial mound of Moon Bear. Carol, her hands bandaged, her face bruised and swollen, sat wrapped in a blanket on one of the kitchen chairs. Barry stood behind her, his head bowed, his hands folded in the attitude of reverence that he understood best. Bobby knelt beside the place where he had lain the flowers on the fresh dirt that now cloaked the earthly remains of Moon Bear. Red Fox had his arms extended toward the golden rays of the rising sun, and he was chanting softly in the tongue of his fathers. Little Turtle had lighted a long clay pipe that was colored with many symbols and decorated with tufts of feathers.

Little Turtle blew smoke in each of the four directions, then allowed a single tendril to stream toward the heavens. He called upon the group spirit of the four-leggeds, the two-leggeds, the winged ones, and the water creatures to aid Moon Bear in crossing the Great River. Then he sang for the White Buffalo Maidens to take Moon Bear to the Land of the Grandfathers.

Twenty-Nine



Two White Buffalo Maidens are coming to take me by the hands. I shall fly with them across the Great River. Soon I shall walk in the Land of the Grandfathers and Grandmothers.

The Thing that is Everything and No Thing is no longer here to hold me to the Earth Mother. It has returned to the breath of life that moves in everything.

I know not if the Navajo healer will ever find his way back to the place that holds my bones, but it no longer matters. The two good Medicine brothers know the songs. They have sung away the Chindi, and they are singing the White Buffalo Maidens to my side.

I am thinking now of Wovoka, and I am hearing his song:

I wear the Morning Star upon my head.

I wear the Morning Star upon my head.

I show it to the children.

I show it to the children.

I talk only of peace.

I talk only of love.

I see all men walking arm in arm as brothers.

I see all women walking arm in arm as sisters.

I will fight with no one.

I will do harm to no one.

I will sing the Great Spirit's song.

I will dance the Great Spirit's dance.

I will do good to all. I will do good to all.

I remember how I brought the false words and the false dance to the Sioux so that they could drive the white man back to the sea. I see now Wovoka was right. It is up to the Great Spirit, the Old Man, to deal with the white man. It is up to the Old Man to deal with all those who have violated the Earth Mother and ill-used her children and her creatures.

And it is up to the Old Man to decide who, among his red children and his white children, are to be re-born in the New World wherein the grasses are tall, the skies are blue, the rivers run clean, and all men and women live together in peace, love, and harmony.

The White Buffalo Maidens are more beautiful than any man could dream.

I go now. The Light is all around me.

The Light is all around me.

I go now.

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