

Mardi Gras Publishing Presents

Dark Desert

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By

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29100 N. Main St. #93
Daphne, AL 36526

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EBook ISBN 0-9787262-1-9

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Abruptly Jill awoke sitting upright bathed in a sweat. The sheets while in a tangled mess were soaked from her perspiring. Reaching over, she turned on the bedside lamp to look around the room. Through the open window, the breeze blowing in from the desert began to dry the sweat from her face. Another dream, she thought, while trying to collect the swirling chaos inside her head.

She felt a sticky wetness between her legs. "I bet I started my period again, damn it!" She said aloud to the room, "no wonder my dreams are so damned strange." Leaning forward she found a big red stain on the sheets. Jill realized the stain was really large. "Damn it, I just finished my stupid period last week. Now, I guess I need to go to the doctor to spend more money that I do not have damn, damn, damn!"

Lately, Jill was talking to herself more and more. Moving to the desert seemed like a good idea at the time to her. All of a sudden, she was beginning to have misgivings about it. Her thoughts as well as her dreams turned dark. So dark that they seemed evil ever since the first day she moved into the small house. The local Goldfield Real Estate agent had shown her several houses. The only one she happened to take a real interest in was the one standing out by itself. For some reason the house seemed as if it was tailor made for her.

The sunsets across the desert were beyond anything she ever saw. They were so beautiful they almost took your breath away. They seemed to be almost spiritual in nature. The commanding view of the surrounding countryside was indeed spectacular. The agent said it was a steal since it was vacant for a while now. That was one of the selling points to Jill. It came furnished completely with dishes even all the linens. It seemed that whoever lived there previously walked away from everything, leaving it all behind.

As the sun was just coming up over the distant mountains, the clock showed it was five thirty. Going into the bathroom, she could feel the blood dripping. It seemed to be running down her legs. Amazingly almost like a miracle all of the bleeding stopped--no typical clotting, just stopped for no apparent reason. Feeling soiled she wanted to wash it away. She stepped into the shower turning the water on as hot as she could stand it.

It helped her. Stepping out, she noticed she was a little sore almost as if she had hard rough sex all night. Shaking her head, she dried off and dressed in jeans with a loose fitting silk shirt. She discovered the best fabric to wear is silk as it was the most comfortable to wear in the desert. Slipping on her boots and a baseball cap, she picked up her keys heading out to her Jeep Wrangler©.

Looking at the Jeep in the early morning light, she felt content. It was her magic carpet to take her any place she wanted to go. It was the color of the desert sand, which made her smile. Her old boyfriend was adamantly against her buying a Jeep, but she had gotten it anyway despite his objections. "What the hell do you want something like it for? We live in Indianapolis. Besides you are not exactly the wild outdoors type."

"Not yet," she replied cryptically. The desire to buy it started two months earlier, when she received a package in the mail from

someone she did not know. The name was unfamiliar. She tore open the paper to discover an oblong wooden antique cigar box about eighteen inches long by nine inches wide and two inches thick. She happened to be alone in the apartment when it arrived and for no apparent reason was a little apprehensive. It seemed as if once she opened it, something would either be gained or lost without her even knowing which.

Slowly she flipped the latch, opening the box. It contained several different things like letters, papers, a small bag of gold dust, and a few nuggets in a leather sack. However, the thing that caught her attention right away just happened to be a small beaded leather pouch. Attached, was a leather-braided rope long enough to hang it around one's neck. She reached for it but stopped, pulling her hand back. Something told her to read the letters and paperwork first.

The letter on top was from the town sheriff of Goldfield Nevada, simply stating the person who owned the box had died and he happened to be a friend of the sheriff. Before he died, he had asked for his meager belongings to be sent to his daughter in Indianapolis. The letter ended formally. She laid it aside trying to absorb what she read. Her mother told her from an early age that her father was killed in Vietnam. Her mother had not left a very good picture of her father in her mind when she was a child. She would say things like, "It is good he died over there, because if he did come home he would have been a drug addict or worse. I do not know why I ever married the loser in the first place."

Carefully avoiding the beaded pouch and digging deeper in the box, she uncovered three military medals with the paper work for them. They were two purple hearts as well as the Silver Star for valor, which she set aside. She got up, walking away from the table to clear her mind. Apparently, her father did not die in the war after all. In fact, he seemed to have been a hero. Standing on the balcony overlooking

Massachusetts Avenue, she caught her breath, stepping back inside. Sitting back down at the table, she picked up one of the letters. It was dated 1973. It was unopened and addressed to her mother. Above the address, in her mother's handwriting, it said, return to sender address unknown.

Shaking, Jill used a letter opener to slit the top of the envelope, and unfolded the handwritten pages.

Dear Linda,

I know you are angry with me for going to war and not going with you to Canada, but I couldn't run away. I love you. I love our daughter even though I haven't seen her or even know what she looks like. Please let me come there to see her. I am out of the hospital, finally off the painkillers. I want my family.

The letter went on... As Jill read what her father had written, she saw him in a completely new light. He had not been killed. He loved her and wanted her. Her mother was a bitter self-centered woman, she thought. Jill shook her head thinking of all the wasted years that could never be made up. Looking at the bag with the turquoise beads, she felt drawn to it. Picking it up by the thong to slowly twirl it, she could see it had been worn for many years. She knew without being told it had been her father who wore it.

Laying it in her left hand, she felt something pass from the bag to her a power or a vibration of some sort. Opening the bag, she shook the contents out onto the tablecloth. Two stones, a bone, a tooth and a braided horse's hair bracelet made from a mane or tail fell out. They seemed to land in a pattern. Jill stared at the objects wondering what they meant. Looking into the bag, she discovered a small piece of paper with the origin of each written on it. There was also a short note stating:

Jill, I am dying and want you to have my medicine bag. Wear it, and it will protect you from the evil spirits. Please wear it. I love you.

Dad

* * *

Jill slipped into the driver's seat of her jeep and started the engine. She drove the two miles to town, heading for the Goldfield Café, the smell of morning in the desert, a heady perfume. The wind, whipping around her in the open vehicle brought a smile to her face, with the bumpy road adding to the charm. As she drove away from the house, she could have sworn she heard someone calling her name. Looking back, she thought she saw a shadow disappearing into the ground.

At the café, parking was no problem since there were no other customers there yet. The owner happened to be turning on the open sign. It was the morning gathering place for everyone in Goldfield. The locals went there several times a week. Jill liked the sound her boot heels made on the floorboards of the porch as she stepped onto it taking the two steps to the screen door. As she headed for the counter, the door slammed behind her.

The owner, looking up, spoke first, "Good morning, what can I get you?"

"A cup of coffee and a new body if you have a spare one back there," Jill responded, smiling at the woman.

Pouring the coffee the owner said, "I am June, I own the place. You are new in town. Jill isn't it?"

Jill smiled at how fast the news traveled in a small town, especially one as isolated as Goldfield.

"A new body huh? I am afraid they are on back order. They don't know when they will come in. Therefore, you will just have to keep the

one you have. What's wrong with it any way? It looks like it is in damn good shape. The men around here are already talking about you." Puzzled, Jill looked up at her.

June continued, "Honey it's a small town, and you are fresh meat. I know it sounds crass, but it's the way they look at you."

"I understand, I have gone into enough bars seeing guys looking at me as if I was a side of prime beef."

Not smiling anymore, June asked. "You bought the old Claws place didn't you?"

Nodding her head, Jill answered, "I got it for practically nothing."

June questioned, "You didn't do any research before you bought it, did you?" Jill shook her head no and June went on. "Honey I do not want to scare you, but the place has been empty for a long time."

"I know that is the reason why I got it so cheap."

"It was vacant for a long time because it has a history. It is said it was built on Sacred Indian ground with some really strange things happening there. There have been unexplained deaths. People have bought it with some just up and walking away, leaving everything. They would not even go back to get their personal belongings."

"Well I don't care. I am not afraid. I put what little money I got from selling the gold my father left me and the last of my savings into it. I am here to stay. Besides, I want to find out what kind of man my father really was."

"You're Red Feather's daughter; I didn't put two and two together. Sheriff Randal should have told us who you are. It's not like him to keep secrets. I see the resemblance now. Your father was my friend. He was a little strange though, but I liked him anyway. He pretty much kept to himself. Do you know where he lived? After my help comes in, if you want, I can take you out to his house; or rather the house he kinda rented from me. All he really did was paid the taxes on it."

"I would like to see where he lived."

“After we come back, I’ll take you over to introduce you to Doc. You can have yourself checked out. Now, what would you like to eat this morning? The first meal is on the house. I have the feeling you’re gonna stay.”

The locals drifted in while she was eating and lingering over coffee. She felt him staring at her without seeing him. It scared her. When she looked up, she looked into the darkest eyes of the most handsome face she had seen. He was obviously Native American with jet black braided hair, going half ways down his back and his body was to die for. Although there were plenty of empty stools, he walked straight to the counter sitting down beside her. The energy seemed to roll off him in waves making her feel lightheaded. She was afraid of him. It was so strange. She felt as if she knew him, knew him well, even though she never met him!

He nodded to her tipping his straw cowboy hat before turning to look at the menu on the wall. She felt the waves of energy continue to wash over as well as through her. Instead of positive energy, she felt weak. She wanted to move, but she felt all her energy drain away. The medicine bag hanging around her neck became heavy. She felt as if she must get out of there. Now!

Standing up to leave, she fell against him and he caught her. His hands felt like they were burning their imprints into her arms. “I’m sorry,” she said, as she pulled away, stumbling outside. Sitting down on the edge of the porch, she dropped her head into her hands and tried to get her bearings. She felt exactly as she had when she awoke that morning. She felt the bleeding start again. The pad seemed to contain it, but she was feeling very uncomfortable.

A big pickup truck pulling a stock trailer full of cattle, pulled up in front of the café, with a ruggedly handsome cowboy getting out. For the second time that morning, she felt a man's energy as he walked up. He stopped directly in front of her, blocking the sun. She looked up

at him, and could not help but smile. His eyes seemed to dance. They were just as dark as the ones she got lost in, in the café. He was Native American also and almost the twin of the man inside.

“Are you alright, Darlin?”

Jill loved the slow sexy drawl in his voice. “I’m okay, I just needed some air.”

“You must be Jill. I was wondering when I would get to meet you. I am Matt. Matt Long Feather,” he said sticking out his hand.

She took it in hers and although the energy was there, it was somehow different, brighter, more user friendly somehow. “Yes, I am Jill Fuller. I am new around here.”

“Can I buy you a cup of coffee?”

Jill could not help herself. She was completely coffee’d out. Nevertheless, she heard herself saying, “I would love one.”

Matt took her by the arm, lifting her as she stood up. Suddenly she realized the medicine bag seemed to grow progressively lighter, the closer he got to her. When he touched her, she could not feel its weight at all. Comforting warmth radiated from it, going right through her. However, when the other man sat down next to her, it got heavy and cold.

As her eyes adjusted to the dimmer light, she looked at the man at the counter. She noticed he stiffened without looking around. Casually, Matt led her to a table by the window. Bustling up, June said, “I should have known you would zero in on her Matt. It is good to see you, but I sure didn’t think you would be in today.”

“I felt a disturbance in the force last night. When I awoke this morning I felt the need for some of your waffles, eggs, and of course, your wonderful coffee.”

June smiled and questioned Jill “He likes Star Wars, can you tell? He is always talking about the force, but he sure is cute, isn’t he?”

As June walked away, Matt smiled, saying, “you have to understand, June use to baby sit me. She loves to embarrass me. Sometimes she succeeds. Now tell me all about yourself.”

“Not much to tell. I moved here from Indianapolis, Indiana, a little while ago, buying a house with a few acres. I am a writer and I have discovered recently how much I love the desert. I want to learn more about my father and the man he was.”

“Who was your father?”

“Red Feather was my Dad.”

“You are Red Feathers daughter? He talked about you all the time, although he never saw you. He would be proud. Red Feather was my—uh,” Matt seemed to stumble, “he was my teacher my—for lack of a better word, Mentor, as well as my friend.”

“Your mentor in what?” she asked.

“Do you know anything about him?”

“Not much.”

June stepped up to the table, sitting the food in front of Matt. “Honey, your father was a Shaman. You know a medicine man. He and Matt were always together.” She said before she turned to walk away.

“I felt it when I got out of the truck, but did not understand what I was feeling. Now it makes perfect sense. Did something strange happen to you last night?”

Jill squirming in her seat not wanting to tell him her private and intimate problems. “I have been having the strangest dreams. I am waking up exhausted, sore, and bathed in sweat.”

“I felt it, but did not understand what I was feeling. Do you wear your medicine bag when you go to bed?”

She touched it under her shirt. “How did you know I have a medicine bag?”

“That is not important. What is important is do you wear it to bed?”

She wondered at his urgency in knowing about the bag, “I take it off and lay it on the table at night before I go to bed and each morning it is on the floor by the wall. I must knock it off the table in my sleep.”

“You have to keep the bag on at all times, especially at night.”

She protested. “It would be too uncomfortable to sleep with so I take it off.”

Matt’s eyes took on a strange look. Some deeper color appeared in them. He spoke sternly this time. “Please wear the bag at night when you go to bed. It was your father’s, it will protect you, but you have to wear it!”

The intensity in his eyes scared her. She sat back against the vinyl seat, once again, feeling short of breath. “Look, I do not know what you are talking about. I do not believe in all the mumbo jumbo crap.”

Matt reached across the table to take her hand in his. “Your father spent a life time as a Medicine man. He was a good man, a very good man. He fought evil wherever or whenever it showed itself. Whether you believe in air or not, it is there, although you cannot see it, it is there. You can feel the wind. Evil exists...with it sometimes choosing the innocent children of the ones who fight it.” As he spoke, he looked around at the man who had been sitting at the counter, who apparently got up and was walking towards them.

She felt the two strong forces of the men hit each other like a warm front and a cold front in weather patterns pushing against one another trying to establish dominance. The warm front won out as the man standing spoke. “Little brother, I can see you have found her.”

“I was drawn to her, Coyote. I think it is my job to protect her. I will use what ever force is necessary to accomplish it.” He stabbed the waffle with his knife, cutting out a fork full putting it into his mouth, biting down with a clicking of his teeth.

Coyote rebutted. "For as Father Sun always rises; Sister Moon also comes. The night belongs to Coyote," stomping down hard with his boot heel, he turned to Jill. "Little Night Bird, you are a creature of the night also." Raising his hand, he touched her jaw running his finger to outline the feature, leaving a feeling of hot ice behind, then turned and left.

"What did he mean by that, Matt?"

"While I have studied the way of Father Sun, and Mother Earth, my brother has chosen to walk in the way of Sister Moon, and the coyote. I do not know what happened to change him. He got lost in the desert when he was five years old. It was seven days before they found him. Surprisingly he was not harmed, physically at least. He looked well fed and watered. He was covered in dried blood, and not his own. My mother told me how he told stories of how the coyote nurtured him. Someone he called "The Old One" taught him many things. When my mother and father asked what kind of things, he would not tell them. He refused to talk about all the stuff he claimed to have learned.

As we grew up, he was the one who always caused my parents' hearts to ache. He liked to torture small animals. He would even go so far as to abuse the other children in the tribe. He seemed to have some sort of power over them, which no one could explain. Little girls in the village were raped and abused." Matt paused uncomfortably. "Blood would come out of them for days afterwards. When they were asked who did it to them, they all said simply, "It was a coyote." My brother has been in and out of jail his whole life. He likes to drink a lot; whiskey usually. When he does drink, he talks crazy talk and becomes very violent. He is an evil sadistic man. He wants you and that is why you must always wear your medicine bag."

"Right, he does not know me, but he wants to hurt me? I cannot believe he would do that. I have never seen him before today."

“He knows you, I can feel it. He is the one causing you to have those bad dreams you are having, if they are dreams at all.”

This was all too much for Jill. “Thanks for the coffee and the uh.... the info, but I have things to do today.” She got out of the booth quickly, heading to the kitchen to get away from Matt.

As she walked away, Matt’s voice echoed from behind.

“Little Night Bird, wear your medicine bag. It will protect you.”

“Whatever,” she mumbled under her breath as she went around the counter escaping into the kitchen.

June was just taking off her apron and hanging it on a peg on the wall, “you ready to go?”

“I do not want to go out the front. Matt and his brother really creep me out.” She replied shaking involuntarily, as if chilled.

“I don’t know what was said to you, but you can believe anything Matt happens to tell you. As for his brother, well now you might want to avoid him. He is really bad news. He scares me. Matt on the other hand makes me feel perfectly safe and comfortable when I’m around him. I have known both the boys since they were small. I use to baby sit them. Matt has always been my sunshine, but his brother is just strange, really odd, if you catch my drift. It is rumored he can shape shift. You know, change his shape to animals and things. It is all just too spooky for me. Sometimes when he stares at me, I get the feeling it isn’t him at all, but some evil old man out to do harm to people. Now I ain’t saying I believe any of that crap. I know Matt does, so did your father. Like I said, your father was a little strange too, but I liked him.

As she was talking, she led Jill out the back door to her beat up pickup. “Get in. It may not look like much but it’ll get us there.”

Jill was able to sightsee as June drove the short distance to the west side of town. June stopped the truck. As she got out, she slammed the door. Jill did the same. She followed her to a gate across a yard of sand and cacti to enter a one-story adobe house. June lifted

the old style latch pushing the door open. Jill caught a movement out of the corner of her eye, turning her head quickly, but it was gone...just a shadow. "Did you see that?" she asked.

"See what?"

"Nothing, I guess my eyes are playing tricks on me."

Jill followed June into the house and stopped, standing there for a moment waiting for her eyes to adjust. June spoke, "Can you feel it?"

"I feel something almost like a vibration or hum. What is it?"

"I asked Red Feather the same thing one time. He said, it was the force. I told him he watched too many movies and he replied, I do not watch movies. I would come over every now and then to just sit with him. Sometimes we would sit for hours not saying a word. When I left, I felt as if I was given the key to the universe. There is something very soothing about this place. It was nowhere near like that, until he moved in, but it sure is now."

"Did you see something over there by the window?"

"I didn't see anything, what was it?"

"I could swear I saw a coyote looking in."

June hurried to the window Jill indicated and glanced around. "Nothing is out there. I think you are just a little jumpy from whatever Matt told you."

Jill wondered around the room touching things imagining her father touching them. Stopping at a low comfortable looking chair in front of a window looking out across the desert gazing, she questioned June. "Was this his favorite place to sit?"

"He would sit there for hours, sometimes days, staring out the window. I often wondered what he saw. When I asked him, he would say, 'answers and questions'."

Jill sat down in the chair looking out the window. Suddenly she was looking through someone else's eyes. Looking down at her hands, she saw they were the hands of an older man. The clothes

were very simple blue jeans and a flannel shirt. In her mind, she felt him. She was her father, having the same thoughts as his.

I knew you would come and I left this energy for you. Listen to Matt for he is the sun. He will protect you. Wear my medicine bag. Do not trust Coyote. He is the evil I have fought against my whole life. I could not be with you during my life, but I can be with you now in death. I have crossed over, but my spirit will always be close to you. I will always be with you.

June touched Jill's shoulder, bringing her out of the trance slowly. Shaking her head, her eyes finally focusing, she spoke. "Whew, I don't know what just happened, but..." and she left it unsaid. "I need some air."

* * *

Driving back to her house, Jill's mind was full to the point of exploding. The drive helped to clear it somewhat, yet still, she had a lot to process. Pulling into her yard, she slipped off the seat to head into the house. As she reached for the knob, she stopped with her hand about six inches from it. The door was ajar. She clearly remembered having shut it and hearing the click. Stepping back closing the screen she peered into the window overlooking the porch. Everything was quiet, and nothing seemed to have been disturbed. "I must be losing it," she said aloud. Opening the screen, she pushed the door open. She sat the dishwashing liquid on the counter and opened the refrigerator door to sit the beer on the shelf. She stood looking at the contents, thinking something did not seem right... Closing it, she picked up the detergent turning to the sink. She wanted to wash her supper dishes she left the night before. They seemed to be gone. Opening her cupboards, she saw they were already washed, and even put away.

“Now this is just too bizarre.” Walking through the house, she could not find anything out of order. Even the blood she neglected to clean off the floor was gone. Her whole house looked as if someone had come to clean for her. Suddenly a dank heavy feeling came over her. She turned to the door seeing Matt’s brother standing there framed by the setting sun behind him.

“I cleaned your house Little Night Bird. I hope you like the way I did it. I hate a messy house when I make love to a woman. Last night I found it upsetting and disappointing you left your dishes unwashed. When you left this morning, you even left some of my offering on the floor. I cleaned up that mess also.”

Jill stood transfixed. The bag around her neck felt as if it weighed at least a hundred pounds if not more. He spoke again, “Take off the Medicine bag. Throw it onto the floor over there,” he pointed, “far away from me. I can not plant my seed in you while you wear it.”

Somewhere in her mind, she heard Matt telling her *never take off the medicine bag*. She could not fight the weight or the voice of Coyote.

In a croaking strained voice, she managed to say. “My father told me to keep it on.”

As Coyote moved closer to her, the string on the bag began to draw blood. The weight was unbearable. He touched her with the tip of his finger. She felt the cut begin to burn where he touched her. She had to keep the bag on no matter what. She felt like it would cut her head off if she left it on. Thoughts of her father swirled in her head. She heard him say to her, *Fight it Jill! You have to fight it!* She fought with all the strength she had. Slowly, she felt Coyote’s power engulf her, taking over her, and she lost all control of herself and her movements. Unconsciously, as if her hand had a will all of its own it lifted the thong, slipping it over her head and letting it drop to the floor.

“That is it my Little Night Bird. Now I can finish the ritual and you will be Mother Coyote. I have waited for you all my life. You are the one.”

His energy saturated her as she dropped the bag, sluggishly kicking it into the corner. Picking her up, as if she were indeed a bird he laid her onto the bed grabbing the front of her jeans ripping them as he pulled them off. She wanted to protest. However, all she could manage was a whispered, strangled, “no.” A part of her mind was screaming, but the part that controlled her muscles to move was silent. From out of nowhere, he brought out an Indian drum. Coyote began chanting as he beat it. How long it went on, she could not tell, but some how she found herself completely naked. She watched him move around the room.

He dropped his jeans and she saw Coyote was wearing the traditional breach cloth made of leather. For a moment, her eyes cleared. She saw he was wearing a coyote skin headdress complete with face of the coyote. *God I must be drugged, but how? This can't be happening!*

He kept chanting, going down on all four, as a coyote would do, while marking the room as his territory. Finishing, he climbed onto the bed. He was no longer a man but an animal! A coyote! Positioning himself over her open legs, he began to enter her.

She felt his hot animal breathe on her face and as she looked into his red eyes, the nausea overcame her. The revulsion was more than she could take.

Coyote did not feel the arrow that came swiftly through the open window, penetrating deep into his back, nor did he feel the arrow tip rip through his heart. He did feel the sage and juniper oil, which the arrow tip had been dipped in, and he did feel the small bone of an eagle, inserted into the hollow shaft of the arrow. He felt his life force drain from his body cleansing the foul seed meant for Jill. His eyes

widened. Somehow, he managed to stand up on the bed falling backwards, dead.

Matt climbed through the window to stand over his brother's body. He was in traditional Indian dress also, with a loincloth, knife, and headband with feather attached to it. His face was painted. Unceremoniously he lifted coyote's body, dumping it out the open window.

Jill lay where she was, unable to move. She was spent and stinking of Coyote's foul attempts. Matt, standing close to the bed took a bundle of sage from the bag at his waist and lit it.

With the eagle's feather from his headband, he fanned the smoke. Pulling the bed away from the wall, he went around the room clockwise smudging it and Jill with the sage. Taking a small tortoise shell rattle out of his bag, he began the ritual of calling in the four directions, starting in the east. Next, he called in the sky and the earth. He then placed the symbols of his totem animals around her to form a circle of healing power and protection. He called the spirits of the elders and of Red Feather to come into the circle to cleanse and heal Jill. Taking out a rope of braided sweet grass, he lit it, laying it next to the sage.

Soon he reached outside the window to bring his drum inside the house. He began to circle the bed keeping a steady rhythm. His chanting and drumming took Jill's, as well as his spirit, to the higher earth where they met the spirits of the elders, including Red Feathers. Jill's spirit knew which one was her father. She stood in front of him. He hugged her with his energy engulfing her. His spirit communicated to hers, everything would be okay. As well as letting her know, she would have to put it behind her. Most importantly, she felt unbounded love. Love so pure it seemed like white clouds surrounding her. Love from her father, love from Matt, love from the elders, and love from the universe flooded into her.

Matt's body was in a frenzy. The drumming slowly increased in speed as the morning drew near. Finally a boom, boom, boom, and all of a sudden it stopped. Matt's spirit returned to his body.

He ran the bathtub full of hot water, dumping a box of salt into it. Gently picking Jill up, he eased her into the water. When she awoke he quietly spoke. "This is how we cleanse crystals. It is part of the ritual necessary to neutralize the poison he may have left in you. After the water cools down, I will carry you outside. You will need to lie on a blanket in the sun to finish the process.

She tried to speak, but the only thing that came out of her mouth was a loud sob. She did not have the strength to speak. In her mind, she was seeing the upper earth level, where her spirit had ascended. She felt all the love given her. The greatest gift of which, came from Matt, his love seemed to know no bounds.

* * *

Smiling, Jill drove the bumpy road into town. The desert changed in the year since the—ordeal. She was still healing, but she was happy. She loved the area even more. They called out the sheriff. He took one look at the scene and Jill's condition and spoke in a proclaiming tone. "Someone should have done this to him long ago. There is no reason to pursue it any farther, case closed." Coyote and his evil were no more.

As Jill stopped in front of the café, she sat for a moment remembering. It was a lifetime ago when she walked into it for the first time. She was seasoned now, hard as nails. Some tourists, a large man with his family walked out of the café. He pulled the wrapper off a candy bar and dropped it onto the porch. Jill was out of her Jeep in a heartbeat to scoop up the paper sticking it right under his nose. "I saw you drop this. I know you didn't come to my home to throw your

garbage around. There is a trash can over there and I suggest you use it.”

The look on her face told him that he would be a very wise man to do as she suggested or he might have to eat it. Taking it, he obediently dropped the paper into the trash. “I’m sorry I was not thinking.”

“You are damned right you were not thinking! You people come though town stopping for a couple of minutes and think you own the place. I live here and we keep it clean, got it?”

His wife turned away so he could not see her smiling. As they turned to leave, the man was grumbling. The wife looked back at Jill giving her the thumbs up.

Jill, seeing Matt’s truck coming in the distance, decided to wait for him. She jumped into his arms as he jumped out of the cab. Her mouth was on his. It was all he could do to keep his legs under him. “Damn girl,” he managed to say. “Where did that come from? Do you have anymore?”

“I found a whole bag of them and they all have your name on’um, that is, if you want them.”

“Damn straight I do, It just caught me a little off guard.”

“I have something else for you, but not here. I want to go to my Dad’s house. It feels good to call him Dad.” She led him to her jeep. They climbed in. Driving to the western edge of town, she stopped in front of her father’s home. Taking Matt’s hand, she led him into the house. When their eyes adjusted to the dimmer light, he saw things were changed a bit. There was a desk, file cabinets, even a computer in the dinning area. She asked June to stop by and light candles, and put champagne on ice. The bed was made with fancy linens.

“I rented this off June for the same deal Dad made with her. I needed an office and it was available. I feel safe here,” she said as she popped the cork pouring the champagne. Handing him a glass

she said. "Here's to you and me, and to my finding my Dad. Oh, and to my new understanding." She raised her glass to drink and he did the same.

Looking at Matt, she said. "Come here you, there is something I have to tell you." Taking his hand again, she led him to the couch. They sat down. She turned to face him saying, "Since...that night, I have loved you. I know I still have a long way to go, but I want you." She was caressing his face with her fingertips. He took her hand kissing each finger.

"I love you, too. I will wait as long as I have to for you. I can not expect you to want to make love to me this soon after," he hesitated, "that night."

Looking at him, she felt her heart swell. "It is more of the fact I am afraid that you will not want me after all that happened."

He held her chin in his strong hands looking her in the eyes. "We are forever a part of each other. I have wanted you since the first time I laid eyes on you. I want you right now. I have been afraid you would not want me since I let you down. I did not get there in time. I let you down, and I am sorry."

Taking his face in her hands, she pulled him over on top of her to kiss him hot and deep. Her hands searched for his jeans snap and zipper. Pushing them down and over his hips, her hands cupped his butt cheeks, marveling at their smoothness. His hands found the buttons to her blouse. Soon they were both naked. Pulling her up, he led her to the bed to lie down. She sat beside him running her hands over his body.

Wrapping her fingers around him, she stroked up and down loving the silkiness. Her breasts ached to be touched. Almost as if he could read her mind, he rolled her nipples between his thumb and forefinger. Her breath was coming faster and faster when she rose up to straddle him easing down onto him until he was all the way inside. Her breath

came out in a huge sigh! She fell forwards onto his chest moving up and down riding him. She was in charge and liked it. He was so gentle. His fingers were working magic exploring her body as no other lover had ever done.

As her mouth found his, she whispered, "breath into me."

He did as she asked, feeling the crossing of a boundary. They both knew they would never be the same. It was more than breathe. It seemed as if their life force passed between them. Matt felt himself building to a release, the tension was too much to take.

Jill's movements were steady, as if wanting it to last forever.

Grabbing her hips, he pulled her down hard, erupting inside her. Jill slowed and then stopped, relishing the feeling of him filling her with his love.

The End