

CHAPTER ONE

I was an arrogant bastard then.

I guess it was about thirty years ago when I first met him. I was an arrogant bastard then, in my late twenties. They're buried just up ahead on the right, just over that rise right there in front of us, on the other side of his trailer—the one we are walking towards at the end of this dirt road. The new owner said it was okay. Thanks for meeting me out here. I hope your motel room in town was comfortable. Kyenta is a kind of nice town, once you get to wander around it for a bit. Its people, the landscape. Nothing like this on the east coast. I'll talk while we walk to the site.

When I met him, it was cold and not like today, but real cold—Boston cold, which made sense since we were in Boston when we met and not out here walking up a dirt road in the middle of the Navajo Nation in Arizona. About as far and remote from modern life as you could get and still get your mail delivered by the U.S. Postal Service.

I remember it was sunny, just like today, and the air was crisp and the sky was clear, what sky you could see from between the buildings. This country, as you can see when you turn around and look, is almost endless. Air Force did their terrain hugging practice flights right through the pass over there. They stopped years ago with the supposed end to the Cold War. Crazy ass pilots are flying lower than the mesas they're flying next to at just under supersonic. You'd wake up out here with a B-1 bomber screaming over your head. Crazy bastards.

Sorry, I do that a lot, side stories. I probably learned it from the Indian as well. Where was I? Oh yeah, telling you about meeting him, the professor—before we met, the first day in the bar, I thought this was going to be quick. It was an old bar in downtown Boston, just north and a little east of the Commons. It smelled of stale liquor and cigarettes and the wood was deep and polished, having been so for the two hundred and fifty years of its existence. It seemed appropriate for the man I was about to deal with and who was about to start to change my life, although I didn't know it at the time and if you said something to me then—about him changing my life, I would have slapped you. No way would that crazy-old-Indian change anything about me. And yet, here I am, walking up this dirt road on the Res with you. Jesus H. Christ!

After having spent time with the old bastard, well, it wasn't easy at first and I almost left several times, not wanting to deal with him and his list of problems only I saw as problems. He threw me out a couple of times and I guess I did leave.

So, here I am, living out here now because of him—in the middle of a part of the planet which hasn't changed for centuries. Did you see the wild horses and goats? You never saw those in Boston.

Wild goats, that one was weird when I moved here. The horses are kinda cool. Remember the old John Wayne movies and all the horses? Things are modern here, sort of—other than your need to look around the professor's powder-blue single wide trailer there with the satellite dish on top and the used tires on his roof. Why? I think it helps muffle the rains' noise when it hits the steel roof. I think—I've never been in it when it was raining hard. I have a patio home in town now with the wife and the occasional visits by the kids home from college.

Being out here when there's weather—yeah, not good. Shit lands hard on a roof and then, sometimes, takes the roof with it when it leaves. Nope, I'll stay in town—now that I'm living here. I've raised a family out here and if you said *anything* about it back then, I would have slapped you—again. She's wonderful and the twins are, well, twins. But they make me happy. Yes, to answer your question, I like it out here—a lot. But don't tell my friends in Boston. They already think I'm nuts.

Back to what I was saying—after a while dealing with him, I was still an arrogant shit bordering on arrogant prick. But something broke inside me as if it had been bent taut with the tension of life and pulled back in to place. I did not know it was, so eventually uncoiling and allowing me to straighten my legs and stand up, metaphorically speaking.

In its place, was a kind of humility. I am walking in it now, and in its surrounding hills and villages. It is a humility I have grown to care very much for. Even more than for myself.

God, I hope I don't lose it. I hope it sticks. It can fade some, of course; drift off when life pushes its face into my world, which is now a family world. It can drift, just so long as it comes back. Since the move out here, the feeling has never left, it has always come back. This walk I'm taking you on, well, maybe you can connect with it as well—see what I see.

Like I said, I live in Kyenta, one of those villages I mentioned on the phone and you stayed there, and actually one of the largest for miles around here, nice place. It has several gas stations and motels and its own fast food restaurants including the biggest and fastest found in Everywhere, USA. People here use them for their Friday-night-out time and they are able to get good food in a peaceful place. These people don't need much and they are humble in what they do have. If you really want to live it up, you drive in to Flagstaff. You can stay at the Best Western there.

I've mellowed a lot since meeting him, and case in point, I wouldn't really care if people had a 'peaceful' dinner on their night out. Now? Well, now those words actually came out of my mouth.

Don't get me wrong, I still can cripple people with my tongue, dance around them with my wit and cognitive ability, and charm the opposite sex—although late in life, as I am now, I found that particular act to be far less enjoyable and actually repugnant to me—using people that is. And the only opposite sex I charm now is my wife, the mother of the twins and frankly, she could cut me better than I could ever do anyone else. Maybe that's what attracted me to her. Dunno.

I put on the mask of my academic prowess when I needed to. But, the old man broke me—the story he told and the life he showed me. I thought I was the person with the answers—all the answers—and if you didn't like the answer I made one up, it was too damn bad.

People think I'm crazy doing what I do out here. The friends I still have in Boston tell me 'Paul, you dumb bastard. What are you doing? You could be making five or ten times what you're making there.' I should say they use to tell me. I don't hear from many of them anymore, just a few and I'm trying to talk them to moving out here, maybe retire close by, go fishing so to speak. I was the person with the brain pan able to see the *truth*, figure it out and present it neat and clean, manipulating it to my will. I was ashamed. Not by him—the professor that is—but by myself. The old man was the catalyst to that end game.

He just held the mirror, I was the one who looked in it and for that, I am truly grateful. Like I said on the phone, he's buried up on that hill, next to his friend I told you about. It is where the wolves show up. If they show up, it will usually be at sunset, and if it is at sunset then they will stay the night, leaving right around sunrise. I hope you have time to listen to the story walking up here. It is an amazing story even though it will seem like a work of fiction, but it's true. I think we can get it in, I think I can tell it all before sunset, if not, definitely before sunrise. You brought a coat, right? It gets damn chilly at night up here on this ridge.

Let me start like I did when you and I talked on the phone, get a good run at it so to speak.