

AUBURN

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Chapter 13 - Opening The Business

The tribe's trucks arrived one at a time for repairs at the repair bays. Wheelchair Bob would send anyone home who had become drunk or high when they had arrived for work. That task could never be pleasant.

One morning four of the mechanics arrived in a white VW camper bus that had seen better days. We painted "Repairs" on both sides in black against its faded white sides. That took hours of touching up until the lettering looked almost professional. We parked it nose out to the shoulder of the road.

That VW bus became something of a commuter van from up the rising ground inside the reservation. They would all arrive with a big hot cup of coffee. I asked if we should have a big coffee pot which didn't get the response I expected. Wheelchair Bob explained the coffee came from their gathering place and social spot. He privately told me to buy the pot. He couldn't fill it from a wheelchair, but I could if he told me how. I wasn't much of a coffee drinker. On Wikipedia I found out that coffee could make me anxious, which seemed to be true. I could make it so Bob liked it. The mechanics did refill from it.

Less than an hour east had the town of Gallup, New Mexico, with a Home Depot close to an Interstate interchange. I bought a generator on sale and an air compressor. Uncle Joe made big decals on his computer reading 'Nati' as labels for that equipment. I bought an air wrench and hand tools from a pawn shop. All of that cost me about a thousand dollars cash.

The tribe sent us a dump truck that needed a clutch. We needed a transmission jack and the clutch needed special tools. Those were expensive. Wheelchair Bob found a Snap-On tool man with a route of Tucson to Flagstaff who rented us those special tools. The rent seemed expensive, but not as expensive as buying them, and the tribe had to pay, or we couldn't do the work.

A few cars arrived for repairs, and then our first truck needing work arrived from outside the tribe.

I went out to greet the single rear axle dump truck and its driver as it stopped outside. I said. "How can we help?"

The owner eyed me up and down with suspicion. "Dump won't lift. Can you fix it?"

"We can look at it. Our hydraulic man is away this afternoon. We can call you tomorrow and tell you what we find. I'm not selling you a bill of goods. Could be expensive, or inexpensive. We'll call and tell you when we have something to say. Good enough?"

His eyebrows bunched up. "That damned Glover screwed it up."

I didn't know a man named Glover. "How so?"

He said. "Put in new seals and they were leaking right quick."

I said. "We may have to buy hydraulic fluid just to inspect. Got the money for that?"

Anger flamed across his face.

I said. "Sorry, sir, but I have to protect the business. We'll look for free. Just being honest with you."

He said. "That's refreshing, sonny boy."

At least he called me a boy.

I pointed to the placard in a window 'No Cash' and below that 'transactions'. "Your choice sir. We can inspect it and call you. Otherwise, take it somewhere else. Do you need a ride if you leave it?"

"Nah." His face echoed whatever thoughts were going through his head. "How much for fluid?"

"Twenty bucks. Might be less; might be more. Have to start someplace. Make you a deal. Twenty dollars flat for the fluid."

A scowl crossed his face, but it became a frown of resignation. He reached around to a chain from a belt loop to his wallet in a back pocket. He drew out that wallet, gave me a twenty from a fat wad, and handed me a battered business card.

I seemed to have pressed my luck about as far as he would let me. I held up that card. "This you? Can we call you at this phone?"

"Damned thing." He nodded, took his cell phone out, and called someone to come pick him up. He appeared less than happy, but he left his truck with us.

In the morning the mechanics rigged a way to lift that dump body with wooden planks over the cab. Then we used old battered planks between the truck frame and the dump body working it higher. We didn't need to make a trip for that hydraulic oil. The problem became obvious. The center ram of the hydraulic lift had been so deeply scoured it would quickly wreck a new seal.

Wheelchair Bob's fingers flew on his computer searching on the internet.

We had to lift that damn dump body again to find the manufacturer of the hydraulic lift. A new center ram would be expensive.

We had Bob call him just in case there was going to be a significant debate about expensive parts. When Bob wrote a VISA card number the rest of us knew we had a genuine repair job to do.

They sent the wrong ram the first time. We told the owner, and that we were ordering again.

We had to both lift that dump bed a third time before we could drop that heavy hydraulic

unit down to the ground. Planks, blocks, rope and tackle, and with a little swearing in English and Navajo we had it down.

Yes, that scouring was the problem. New seals arrived.

I called the owner when we had it all ready.

He growled. "You took your sweet time, damn it."

"Sorry, sir, it was the wrong part and the deliveries. We can show you the tickets for the dates. Oh, the price is \$6,000, sir. Your credit card turned down the charge. Bring another card."

When he arrived with another man in a car they had their hats down low over their eyes.

We fired that truck up. "You wanna operate it, or watch?"

He liked having the choice, and watched. Actually he cocked an ear. "Sounds good."

The next day they limped a two axle trailer in behind that truck. That had to be a bear of a project needing a tire and welding. We brought in a welding unit from the tribe, but the tire and rim went to Gallup, New Mexico.

When they arrived for that trailer they brought a pickup with steam coming from under the hood. In addition to a water pump, it needed an engine head job.

His Visa card wouldn't take the charge. To his credit he wired the money to Joe's bank. Joe retaliated by taking me to the nearest bank branch located in Flagstaff. They frowned at me for not having an Arizona driver's license to prove I existed and my legal name. Joe frowned right back with a choice of they would either open the business a bank account so we could receive wire transfers, or Joe would. They liked that until Joe told them I would be a second signature which flummoxed them all over again. Wheelchair Bob's driver's license and Navajo address that got us that bank account.

The next thing that customer brought us was a bulldozer. That was an overload on that trailer.

One of the mechanics spoke for all of us when he growled "that God damned thing."

The price for repairs for that 'damned 'dozer' was more than all the business we had ever been paid for before. We told him the cost. He said "do it."

When he arrived for his newly rejuvenated 'dozer he brought a backhoe.

I planted myself in front of his scowling mug. "Uh, sir, you're bringing us lots of work for which we are grateful. We hope we're living up to your expectations. But we need a little help?"

He scowled again with a growl in his voice. "What?"

"We need a better business name, sir. Can you think of something?"

He rubbed the stubble on his chin as he ran his eyes across the horizon all around. "Beats the hell out of me, kid. Tell you what, if Arizona looks at you they will be facing east. That's into a blinding sunrise as they start their day only to remember that God Damned piece of equipment

broke down the day before.”

I remembered how the Sorceress had hidden in the bright sunrise my second morning here. “Sunrise service?”

“Works for me, kid.” He clamped his mouth shut and stomped off to his truck with that trailer and overload of that ‘dozer. An empty beer can fell out of the cab when he opened the door.

We called Uncle Joe and the Chapter Chief for a Tribal Truck Council meeting. The Chief’s eyebrows popped up when we told him how much money we had.

The mechanics were pleased with taking home real pay. The Agency Chief visited. We bought used shop equipment, a better air compressor, a refrigerator, had the well redrilled, and replaced the restroom. We also repainted that sign on the roof as Sunrise Service with a homemade looking rendition in the bright reds and yellows of a rising sun.

A crime detection truck with a glossy exterior and fancy lettering pulled into the parking lot followed by two county police cruisers. Somebody must have sent them to me as they asked for me by name. They scowled when they saw me with a sun tanned face, long hair, and in a sweat streaked shirtdress.

I made a small half squint right back at them. “Yes, I’m Nati. I have the business license. What can we do for you?” That sounded so stupid, but I couldn’t think of anything better. I had big doubts they would let us work on any official vehicles.

A woman in a dark blue uniform spoke first. “Drug tests.”

I frowned. “Drug tests? Who says?”

“We test all the auto repair shops.”

“You got a Federal warrant?”

“Federal?”

“The Indian reservation boundary is right across the parking lot a few feet behind you.” No one knew exactly where the boundary was, but I had serious doubts they would know. “You’re on tribal lands and all of the mechanics are Navajo.”

“No non-native Americans?”

“Just me with the business license. If you want any of my urine, I’ll hand you my wet diaper.”

All of their faces scowled. “Diaper?”

“That’s right. Diaper. I wear diapers full time.”

Their faces very subtly said that diaper word flummoxed them.

One of the men officers interrupted. “Are you male or female?”

“My voice should have told you I am male.”

Their faces strongly said they didn't like being told they were being stupid. "Why in the hell are you disguised as a woman? And why the diaper? Have a medical condition?"

"I'm not disguised as anything. I want to wear diapers just because that's what I want to do, and a dress keeps others from being upset by my bulging butt. Last I heard this is a free country, or did someone ring a bell and change that without telling me? If you want to see my driver's license as a picture ID, that's in my shoulder bag in the office." I didn't tell them I had a revolver in there too.

There was a pause.

I said. "I protest your intrusion. This is tribal land."

One of the men scowled. "What are you doing here if you're no Indian?"

I said. "They asked me to get a business license because of past abuses every time an Indian had one for here at this location. The property owner told me she won't do business with a Native American, and she used colorful language. I live in town on the reservation." I tossed my head in the direction of that small town which might be more of a village. "I never have exchanged my earlier driver's license for an Arizona one as I almost never drive."

He said. "Are you the only officer of the corporation?"

I said. "What corporation? I never incorporated. Nobody could give me a compelling reason. I worked odd jobs and temp work all across this country and have had it up to here." I held my fingers horizontally across my nose. "With abusive bosses and their unhappy employees. I don't want to get caught up in all that and become one of those."

The woman officer's eyes were on something behind me. "No cash transactions?"

I said. "That's right. No cash means no drug runners, no illegal immigrants, and no terrorist money. We're way out here with no protection. It would get mighty lonesome if an armed robber tried. We keep nothing to steal. No cash; no oil; no little nuts, bolts, screws, and light bulbs. We can make two runs a day to the auto parts stores and dealerships."

They thought that over.

All but one of them retreated for a private pow wow.

I said. "Best go join them. A few places I worked put me down as disabled for their records because of my diapers. Tell them the chemicals in disposable diapers might mess up their tests. I'll stand right here where you can watch me. I think you had better join them."

He went to their little huddle.

They did want to see my driver's license.

I led them into the heat of the little office, and pulled my wallet out past my unused diaper in there without revealing my revolver. I handed them my license. While one of them took notes I added another detail. "You'll want my address." I gave them Joe's.

The pen paused of the police officer writing notes. "That's no mailing address. What zip code?"