

AUBURN

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Chapter 12 - Business License

I had been about to say something, but the older woman in the County Office held up a finger. She went in the back and returned. "You say the Navajos want you to do this?"

"Not that far, Ma'am. One of the local men wanted me to find out. He is going to ask them about the building. He wants me to find out here what you all want." I felt like brushing off more dog hair, but restrained myself. "It has been a long ride to reach here. Would it be possible to have that license instead of running back and forth. I have to hitch a ride every time."

"Here." She had a friendly slight smile as she pulled a form from under the counter. She wrote "tribal" in the space for the occupancy permit number. She swivelled the form around for me and handed me a ball point pen. "Go ahead. We work with the tribes as best we can. Your story must be true as no one could think that up."

I filled in several places with a "none" such as incorporation, officers, directors, and then I came to the question for my address. I honored that with a quizzical look as she stood there. I wrote:

Nelson's Store
Navajo Nation

and signed it with my own name with a "Nati" in quotes as a nickname in the middle.

She pulled out more forms.

She went into a back room and returned handing me a business license for a parking lot in front of that abandoned building. "Good luck."

Back at the car Ginger became ecstatic at seeing me. I put her in the back seat as my legs had enough of her. She hid on the floor back there, but jumped up on the seat. She tried jumping over the back of the front seat. I barely kept her back. She became very unhappy back there, but my ride wanted the air conditioning.

I asked him to stop the car, and switched to sitting in the back seat. With her front paws on my lap covered with that shirt again, she put wet nose marks all over the window on my side. In soft tones I explained the driver wanted air conditioning. I doubt Ginger understood a word I said, but she seemed comforted by my tone. Finally she lay down on the seat with her head in my lap as I gently scratched and rubbed her.

I gave the driver gas money and an extra twenty dollars for his trouble with my dog.

At the Sorceress' the other two dogs immediately smelled the veterinarian's antiseptic in Ginger's fur and backed away. At bedtime they accepted her again with the lingering odor.

Joe scanned my business license into his computer, printed extra copies, sent me that electronic copy by e-mail, and handed me the original. I asked him to put that original in his safe, but he said no. He relented when I told him keeping it in my backpack would crease and damage the paper.

Several days later Joe sent a message with one of the Sorceress' Acolytes he needed me.

I thought of a job as his temporary store clerk, but no, the local Tribal leadership wanted to meet me.

He must have told the Sorceress or the Acolytes as they arrived one morning with a new dress for me. Julia held it up displaying it over herself. It was a medium royal blue. I loved the color. "We're not letting you visit with the Chief looking like something a coyote left out back." Her fingers pointed at a chair.

They brushed my hair, but the grit kept catching the brush and hurting me pulling on hairs. "Nati. You **are** a boy. We're going to have to wash your hair. Come lay down on a mattress."

One of them fetched a bottle of shampoo from the bathroom.

When I lay down they put a wide pan under my head and gave my hair a real warm water and shampoo washing.

They unnerved me. Not with their fingers in my hair, or the warm water, or any of that. It became the way they smiled at me. My feelings spiked and tanked repeatedly. When I tried complaining, they mimicked the Sorceress with a finger to their lips as if to say 'hush; just let us; we care.'

They must have used two or three different towels almost drying my hair. "Scoot up on the mattress."

Which I did. My stomach clenched at my skirt pulling up as I slid, and maybe showing my diaper bulge between my legs. When I reached down one of them slapped my hand and they pulled my skirt hem down my legs. I blushed at the thought of that bulge making a hump in my dress.

They put a pillow with another new towel under my damp hair. "Nati. Don't tell us no. We know all about you anyway. We're not just the Sorceress' students as we also take modern psychology, counseling, and native culture courses at the community colleges on the reservation. You cooperate or the Sorceress will put a hex on you."

I must have scowled.

"Oh, no, Nati. That had been teasing. C'mon, have a little fun with us. But she might do something. OK?"

They let me up, had me sit in that chair again, and trimmed my hair straight across in back. While they did that I thought about not having ever had a nickname in

high school, and never quite fitting in. At least I had a nickname now, and they were being friends. Maybe I had better let them.

“Now don’t be trouble when we have you switch dresses. Go back into the bedroom and put the new one on.” I became terrible embarrassed with the thought of their seeing my diaper even though they had said they knew everything about me. When I came out they fiddled getting the new dress to settle on me.

They had a small cosmetic mirror for me to see myself. The dress had a matching cloth belt which they threaded through my knife sheath and hung that at my left side. “Hush, Nati. Just be your two spirit self. Let us take care of you. Please. We hear things, and if you’re going to work with Navajo mechanics in that business, we want you to trust us. Trust us enough we can alert you if we ever hear of trouble. OK?”

“Now come here.” They had a group hug of the four of them with me which confused me. I hadn’t been used to hugs.

A few mornings later they did my hair again and used a little makeup concealing an acne bloom. How they matched the color of my sun tanned face I didn’t know, but they did. My skin wasn’t quite the same as the Native Americans. They had me put on that royal blue dress, fiddled with it, and sent me off.

Joe and I met in a conference room at the nearby public library. I had never been so self conscious in my life as I became walking into that room in that beautiful new dress. One of those young women should have been wearing it; not me. I held my old worn fedora in my hand.

They called us to a room where both of the men had that round face so common with the Indians. Both wore a white shirt and one had a bolo tie. “Come in Joe. This must be Nati. Glad to meet you. Have a seat.” Ronny served as the Chief of the local Chapter for this town. Ben served as the Agency Chief in their hierarchy between the Chapter and the Navajo Nation Council.

Joe explained what he wanted to do, and why because of the past shenanigans at that abandoned gas station.

Ben picked up the beat. “Nati, you have any experience?”

Joe stretched out my story about all those jobs. He told them more than I remembered telling him. When he told of my driving that big truck being challenged I knew he had talked with the State Police. They had run a search on me. “It would be his business license, but he doesn’t want an SBA bank loan or anything like that. Wants no money kept on the premises; nothing that could be stolen.”

Ronny frowned. “How could you make that work?”

Joe said. “He says he wants a sign in the window ‘no cash transactions’.” Joe let the oddity of that statement settle in. “Remember all the troubles at that abandoned gas station and the defunct convenience store a little further along that road? He wants to do this another way. If the tribe will buy the parts for the tribe’s own truck repairs, he wants the tribe’s mechanics to come down and fix the trucks here. Seeing the work in progress may attract business. Only buy the parts and bring in the mechanics when there is work to be done.”

He paused. "You know, what's really odd about this is his gentleness. He saw so many business owners so be mean spirited with their low wage staff that he doesn't want to boss anyone around or abuse anyone. He's just making a place on the reservation for the tribal mechanics. He's got the costs down to nothing just to have a sign at the highway. He might be on to something. This could work."

Ben said. "We thought this is your business Joe. Where are you in all this?"

Joe said. "I can't sit there. Nati can. He doesn't claim he can boss anyone around. Just the opposite. How about this. Have a local Council of Nati, two of the mechanics chosen by them, someone else I have in mind, and myself. Have that local Council report to the Chapter Council and on up to a Council of seven at the Agency level."

You could almost see those two chiefs thinking that through. "Do you want a lease?"

I leaned a little forward. "No, sir. Uh, what am I to call you? Sir? Mayor? Chief? Chiefs? I have a lease, sir, from that elderly woman. If you don't like what happens, just throw me off. I can always walk on down that highway the same as I had been doing before. I'd hope you would tell me first how you want things done, but I've done odd jobs all across this country. The thing I've seen everywhere is a bunch of dumb bosses throwing their weight around making the staff miserable. Joe says I am gentle. I have no idea about that. My requirement is no drunk mechanics, and be gentle with me, the equipment, and the customers. Half the proceeds go to the people, your people, doing the work, and the other half is for repairing the property, and bringing in the equipment needed — such as an air compressor."

Ronny asked. "What about you?"

I said. "I'm fed. I'm out of the weather. I have what I need. Pay me later if this works. If not, there isn't anything to pay."

Ben asked. "Who told you that you could wrap that snake skin around your hat in a traditional way?"

I held the hat up. "The Sorceress wrapped the skin around my hat. I didn't know."

Joe grinned. "She tells me he killed the snake and brought it to her. Big snake, too. His killing it allows him to keep it. She tied it with those rattles her way on the side because he earned it killing that big rattlesnake. Him and his dog killed that snake to be precise."

There were nods of understanding. "Nati; tell us straight. Why are you wearing a dress?"

"Because I want to. Last I heard this is a free country, or did someone ring a bell and change that? Too many Anglos didn't like me." I paused. That Sorceress and probably her students had probably been talking about me behind my back. Joe may have already told these two Chiefs. I had better chance it. "The truth is, sir, that I want to wear diapers. I've wanted to for years. This isn't a new idea for me. The dress hides the diapers. People scowled at me and my diaper bulge when I wear pants."

Ben asked. "That's it? That's all?"

I said. "Yes, sir. That's all. Now you can tell me to go away if you can't stand me as I am."

Joe interrupted. "Just a new form of a two spirit person."

They nodded ever so slightly. "What makes you think you can run a business?"

"That's up to you. You and the mechanics. I haven't asked Uncle Joe here, that's my name for Joe Nelson, of can the customer's credit card charges go through some account of his store. I don't have a bank account, and I don't have an in-state driver's license or a real address here to get one. If the mechanics vote something about the work, that's their choice. They get to say. That is, they and the tribe. I've seen strange things in all those places I worked. Bunch of abusive crooks. As Joe says, have a tribal member be the bookkeeper. I caught a ride with an old Indian who didn't like my knife at my waist." I stood up just a little so they could see it. "He gave me a lift when I said 'don't take my stuff and I don't take yours.' Worked then. Why not here?"

Ben said. "Oh, I think you know that; just that you don't know you know. How are you going to recruit the mechanics from the tribe?"

I said. "Walk the roads and ask."

Joe interrupted. "We can do that. He found a derelict big sign we can paint and put up on the roof. We'll start the grapevine with that. And you. You know the trucks needing repairs. Start talking. I know someone who will stay at the front desk and read the instruction manuals off the Internet from the manufacturers."

Doubt crossed the faces of those two Chiefs. "Who?"

"Wheelchair Bob, the crippled Iraqi War veteran. He'll be so damned grateful to have something meaningful to do he'll be like a hawk watching the books of parts, time, and charges to customers."

"Got a name?"

"Tribal Truck."

Ben said. "Son, you're different. I get the dress. You're not trying to be a woman when you aren't. You're trying to be yourself as if that is too much to ask of the world. We'll have to talk it over and let you know."

I nodded and walked out carrying my hat. My feelings cycled between awful and relieved. I sat in the lobby as they took an hour talking among themselves.

When Joe came out he had a big grin. "They are impressed with your honesty, and you trusted them with your secret. The answer is yes. They want a better name for the business."