

THE TRADING POST

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"You are now entering the San Carlos Indian Reservation," the sign read.

"We should've stopped for breakfast back in Pima," Garry said. "Not likely we'll find much for the next sixty miles."

We had been driving for about an hour, taking the scenic route from Safford, at the foot of Mount Graham, northwest on route seventy toward Globe. From there we would pick up route seventy-seven and travel south to Tucson. Interstate ten was a more direct route—forty miles shorter—but all desert, while our way would take us through the Superior Mountains south of Globe. We weren't in a hurry, so we decided to be tourists.

The reservation lands were barren; the road was the only break in the monotony. Mountains loomed about twenty miles back from either side of the highway. They were cloaked in a mid-morning haze.

I could understand now why the Indians hated us so. The mountains we "gave" them were the leftovers—left over after the copper, silver and turquoise mines had been scooped up, along with the Mount Lemmons, the Grand Canyons, and other tourist attractions. Nothing was attractive about the reservation. Its mountains interrupted the desert more like warts spreading on a hand. The only vegetation the scaly peaks spawned was some mesquite, supplemented by tumbleweed and cactus on the badlands. The sky was the only item we had failed to cheat the Indians on; it was as blue on the reservation as it was elsewhere in Arizona.

Garry slowed down as we approached some houses and told me to look at them closely. The government built the dwellings for the Indians, he said, and supplemented a place to live and land to work with \$8,000 a year to every Indian over age eighteen, just because he was a Native American. The houses were hollow, though. The Apaches had removed windows, doors and floors, keeping their livestock in the shells. The Native Americans lived in mud huts about a quarter-mile east of the barns.

We had passed a couple of country stores and, finally convinced we weren't going to find a restaurant, we stopped at Indian Joe's Trading Post for a snack. Joe's place had rusted gasoline pumps in

front, no longer used. The brands they had offered once, long before the '74 energy crunch, had become as extinct as the prices on the pumps. A palomino with an Indian blanket over its back was tied to a hitching post on the north side of the store, and a drunken Indian was passed out in the weeds to the south. Indian Joe perhaps?

The screen in the door was rusted, and paint was peeling from its frame. It squeaked as I pulled it open, and the warped floorboards winced under my weight. The sun winked at me through slits in the walls; crowds of flies clumped in pow-wows on sticky-paper hung from the rafters.

I glanced at the selection of Hostess treats, grabbed a package of Ding Dongs and handed them to Garry to pay for. He went towards the back of the store in search of milk and fresh fruit, while I checked out the health and beauty aids aisle. Indian Joe's had all the products the drugstores stocked. Right Guard deodorant was available for \$3.89, razor blades for \$4.35 and sewing kits, the travel kind, for \$2.57.

With milk, Ding Dongs and three bananas in hand, Garry approached the cash register; I was right behind him. An Indian boy of about twelve, to whom the horse belonged, was ahead of us. While waiting for his change he looked up at Garry and asked, "Hey mister, that your car?" Garry nodded. The boy leaned to his right to look out the door at the red Corvette, holding onto the counter with his left. He looked back up at us, puzzled, as he walked backward out the door. We heard the horse carry him off while we were paying.

Indian Joe turned out to be the Anglo desert rat with the rotting teeth and furrowed skin who was working the register. While Garry paid him, I squatted to survey the dusty glass case loaded with turquoise jewelry. The menagerie of animals represented in the display with inlaid wings and mottled backs, all the color of the sky, would have made any zoo proud. "All made by Indians on the reservation," Joe said.

Just like every other souvenir in Arizona, I thought, and just as over-priced.

"Care to look closer at any of 'em?" he asked.

His fingers, wrists and throat were as loaded with the blue stuff as the case. "No, thanks," I answered politely, dying to know what his margin of profit was. Garry read my mind and nudged me. "Let's go," he said.

I grabbed the sack breakfast and turned to leave. As I did, I came face to face with a cigar store Indian. "How!" Joe chortled, jowls

jiggling, as I started. Garry put his hand against my back and guided me out of the store. The drunk was asleep still, his hat over his face to block out the noonday sun.

We climbed in the car and left Indian Joe's Trading post in a dust cloud. We hadn't gone a mile when we saw the Indian boy and his palomino. As we approached him it seemed as if he'd been waiting for us; he began to trot, then gallop the horse on the roadside, competing with the car until it left him, too, behind in a cloud of dust.

