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Bestselling author of SACRED CLOWNS and A THIEF OF TIME



COYOTE WAITS

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Tony Hillerman

LEAPHORN & CHEE 10

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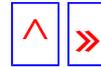
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*For my great friend and brother-in-law, Charles Unzner,
and
For our world-class next-door neighbors—
Jim and Mary Reese, and Gene and Geraldine Bustamante*

Chapter 1



OFFICER JIM CHEE was thinking that either his right front tire was a little low or there was something wrong with the shock on that side. On the other hand, maybe the road grader operator hadn't been watching the adjustment on his blade and he'd tilted the road. Whatever the cause, Chee's patrol car was pulling just a little to the right. He made the required correction, frowning. He was dog-tired.

The radio speaker made an uncertain noise, then produced the voice of Officer Delbert Nez. "... running on fumes. I'm going to have to buy some of that high-cost Red Rock gasoline or walk home."

"If you do, I advise paying for it out of your pocket," Chee said. "Better than explaining to the captain why you forgot to fill it up."

"I think..." Nez said and then the voice faded out.

"Your signal's breaking up," Chee said. "I don't read you." Nez was using Unit 44, a notorious gas hog. Something wrong with the fuel pump, maybe. It was always in the shop and nobody ever quite fixed it.

Silence. Static. Silence. The steering seemed to be better now. Probably not a low tire. Probably... And then the radio intruded again.

"... catch the son-of-a-bitch with the smoking paint gun in his hand," Nez was saying. "I'll bet then..." The Nez voice vanished, replaced by silence.

"I'm not reading you," Chee said into his mike. "You're breaking up."

Which wasn't unusual. There were a dozen places on the twenty-five thousand square miles the Navajos called the Big Rez where radio transmission was blocked for a variety of reasons. Here between the monolithic volcanic towers of Ship Rock, the Carrizo Range, and the Chuska Mountains was just one of them. Chee presumed these radio blind spots were caused by the mountains but there were other theories. Deputy Sheriff Cowboy Dashee insisted that it had something to do with magnetism in the old volcanic necks that stuck up here and there, like great black cathedrals. Old Thomasina Bigthumb had told him once that she thought witches caused the problem. True, this part of the Reservation was notorious for witches, but it was also true that Old Lady Bigthumb blamed witches for just about everything.

Then Chee heard Delbert Nez again. The voice was very faint at first. "... his car," Delbert was saying. (Or was it "... his truck"? Or "... his pickup"? Exactly, precisely, what had Delbert Nez said?) Suddenly the transmission became clearer, the sound of Delbert's delighted laughter. "I'm gonna get him this time," Delbert Nez said.

Chee picked up the mike. "Who are you getting?" he said. "Do you need assistance?"

"My phantom painter," Nez seemed to say. At least it sounded like that. The reception was going sour again, fading, breaking up into static.

"Can't read you," Chee said. "You need assistance?"

Through the fade-out, through the static, Nez seemed to say "No." Again, laughter.

"I'll see you at Red Rock then," Chee said. "It's your turn to buy."

There was no response to that at all, except static, and none was needed. Nez worked up U.S. 666 out of the Navajo Tribal Police headquarters at Window Rock, covering from Yah-Ta-Hey northward. Chee patrolled down 666 from the Ship Rock subagency police station, and when they met they had coffee and talked. Having it this evening at the service station-post office-grocery store at Red Rock had been decided earlier, and it was upon Red Rock that they were converging. Chee was driving down the dirt road that wandered back and forth across the Arizona-New Mexico border southward from Biklabito. Nez was driving westward from 666 on the asphalt of Navajo Route 33. Nez, having pavement, would have been maybe fifteen minutes early. But now he seemed to have an arrest to make. That would even things up.

There was lightning in the cloud over the Chuskas now, and Chee's patrol car had stopped pulling to the right and was pulling to the left. Probably not a tire, he thought. Probably the road grader operator had noticed his maladjusted blade and overcorrected. At least it wasn't the usual washboard effect that pounded your kidneys.

It was twilight—twilight induced early by the impending thunderstorm—when Chee pulled his patrol car off the dirt and onto the pavement of Route 33. No sign of Nez. In fact, no sign of any headlights, just the remains of what had been a blazing red sunset. Chee pulled past the gasoline pumps at the Red Rock station and parked behind the trading post. No Unit 44 police car where Nez usually parked it. He inspected his front tires, which seemed fine. Then he looked around. Three pickups and a blue Chevy sedan. The sedan belonged to the new evening clerk at the trading post. Good-looking girl, but he couldn't come up with her name. Where was Nez? Maybe he actually had caught his paint-spraying vandal. Maybe the fuel pump on old 44 had died.

No Nez inside either. Chee nodded to the girl reading behind the cash register. She rewarded him with a shy smile. What was her name? Sheila? Suzy? Something like that. She was a Towering House Dineh, and therefore in no way linked to Chee's own Slow Talking Clan. Chee remembered that. It was the automatic checkoff any single young Navajo conducts—male or female—making sure the one who attracted you wasn't a sister, or cousin, or niece in the tribe's complex clan system, and thereby rendered taboo by incest rules.

The glass coffee-maker pot was two-thirds full, usually a good sign, and it smelled fresh. He picked up a fifty-cent-size Styrofoam cup, poured it full, and sipped. Good, he thought. He picked out a package containing two chocolate-frosted Twinkies. They'd go well with the coffee.

Back at the cash register, he handed the Towering House girl a five-dollar bill.

"Has Delbert Nez been in? You remember him? Sort of stocky, little mustache. Really ugly policeman."

"I thought he was cute," the Towering House girl said, smiling at Chee.

"Maybe you just like policemen?" Chee said. What the devil was her name?

"Not all of them," she said. "It depends."

"On whether they've arrested your boyfriend," Chee said. She wasn't married. He remembered Delbert had told him that. ("Why don't you find out these things for yourself," Delbert had said. "Before I got married, I would have known essential information like that. Wouldn't have had to ask. My wife finds out I'm making clan checks on the chicks, I'm in deep trouble.")

"I don't have a boyfriend," the Towering House girl said. "Not right now. And, no. Delbert hasn't been in this evening." She handed Chee his change, and giggled. "Has Delbert ever caught his rock painter?"

Chee was thinking maybe he was a little past dealing with girls who giggled. But she had large brown eyes, and long lashes, and perfect skin. Certainly, she knew how to flirt. "Maybe he's catching him right now," he said. "He said something on the radio about it." He noticed she had miscounted his change by a dime, which sort of went with the giggling. "Too much money," Chee said, handing her the dime. "You have any idea who'd be doing that painting?" And then he remembered her name. It was Shirley. Shirley Thompson.

Shirley shuddered, very prettily. "Somebody crazy," she said.

That was Chee's theory too. But he said: "Why crazy?"

"Well, just because," Shirley said, looking serious for the first time. "You know. Who else would do all that work painting that mountain white?"

It wasn't really a mountain. Technically it was probably a volcanic throatanother of those ragged upthrusts of black basalt that jutted out of the prairie here and there east of the Chuskas.

"Maybe he's trying to paint something pretty," Chee said. "Have you ever gone in there and taken a close look at it?"

Shirley shivered. "I wouldn't go there," she said.

"Why not?" Chee asked, knowing why. It probably had some local legend attached to it. Something scary. Probably somebody had been killed there and left his *chindi* behind to haunt the place. And it was tainted by witchcraft gossip. Delbert had been raised back in the Chuska high country west of here and he'd said something about that outcropor maybe one nearbybeing one of the places where members of the skinwalker clan were supposed to meet. It was a place to be avoidedand that was part of what had fascinated Officer Delbert Nez with its vandalism.

"It's not just that it's such a totally zany thing to do," Delbert had said. "Putting paint on the side of a rocky ridge, like that. There's a weirdness to it, too. It's a scary place. I don't care what you think about witches, nobody goes there. You do, somebody sees you, and they think you're a skinwalker yourself. I think whoever's doing it must have a purpose. Something specific. I'd like to know who the hell it is. And why."

That had been good enough for Chee, who enjoyed his own little obsessions. He glanced at his watch. Where was Delbert now?

The door opened and admitted a middle-aged woman with her hair tied in a blue cloth. She paid for gasoline, complained about the price, and engaged Shirley in conversation about a sing-dance somebody was planning at the Newcomb school. Chee had another cup of coffee. Two teenaged boys came in, followed by an old man wearing a T-shirt with DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY printed across the chest. Another woman came, about Shirley's age, and the sound of thunder came through the door with her. The girls chatted and giggled. Chee looked at his watch again. Delbert was taking too damned long.

Chee walked out into the night.

The breeze smelled of rain. Chee hurried around the corner into the total darkness behind the trading post. In the car, he switched on the radio and tried to raise Nez. Nothing. He started the engine, and spun the rear wheels in an impatient start that was totally out of character for him. So was this sudden sense of anxiety. He switched on his siren and the emergency flashers.

Chee was only minutes away from the trading post when he saw the headlights approaching on Route 33. He slowed, feeling relief. But before they reached him, he saw the car's right turn indicator blinking. The vehicle turned northward, up ahead of him, not Nez's Navajo Tribal Police patrol car but a battered white Jeepster. Chee recognized it. It was the car of the Vietnamese (or

Cambodian, or whatever he was) who taught at the high school in Ship Rock. Chee's headlights briefly lit the driver's face.

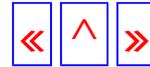
The rain started then, a flurry of big, widely spaced drops splashing the windshield, then a downpour. Route 33 was wide and smooth, with a freshly painted center-line to follow. But the rain was more than Chee's wipers could handle. He slowed, listening to the water pound against the roof. Normally rain provoked jubilation in Chee feeling natural and primal, bred into dry-country people. Now this joy was blocked by worry and a little guilt. Something had delayed Nez. He should have gone looking for him when the radio blacked out. But it was probably nothing much. Car trouble. An ankle sprained chasing his painter in the dark. Nothing serious.

Lightning illuminated the highway ahead of him, showing it glistening with water and absolutely empty. The flash lit the ragged basalt shape of the formation across the prairie to the south the outcrop on which Nez's vandal had been splashing his paint. Then the boom of thunder came. The rain slackened, flurried again, slackened again as the squall line of the storm passed. Off to the right Chee saw a glow of light. He stared. It came from down a dirt road that wandered from 33 southward over a ridge, leading eventually to the "outfit" of Old Lady Gorman. Chee let the breath whistle through his teeth. Relief. That would probably be Nez. Guilt fell away from him.

At the intersection, he slowed and stared down the dirt road. Headlights should be yellow. This light was red. It flickered. Fire.

"Oh, God!" Chee said aloud. A prayer. He geared the patrol car down into second and went slipping and sliding down the muddy track.

Chapter 2



UNIT 44 WAS parked in the center of the track, its nose pointed toward Route 33, red flames gushing from the back of it, its tires burning furiously. Chee braked his car to a stop, skidding it out of the muddy ruts and onto the bunch grass and stunted sage. He had his door open and the fire extinguisher in his hand while the car was still sliding.

It was raining hard again, the cold drops splashing against his face. Then he was engulfed in the sickening black smoke of burning rubber, burning oil, burning upholstery. The driver's-side window had been shattered. Chee fired the extinguisher through it, seeing the white foam stream through the smoke, and seeing through the smoke the dark shape of Nez slumped over the steering wheel.

"Del!"

Chee snatched at the door handle, barely conscious of the searing pain. He jerked the door open and found himself engulfed in a gust of flames. He jumped back, whacking at the fire burning his uniform shirt. "Del," he shouted again. He sprayed the extinguisher foam into the car again, dropped the extinguisher, reached through the open door, clutched the arm of Officer Delbert Nez and pulled.

Nez was wearing his seat belt.

Chee fumbled for the catch, released it, pulled with all his strength, aware as he did that his palm was hurting in a way he had never experienced before. He tumbled backward into the driving rain, he and Delbert Nez. He lay for a moment, gasping, lungs full of smoke, conscious that something was wrong with the hand, and of the weight of Delbert Nez partly across him. Then he was aware of heat. His shirt sleeve burning. He put it out, struggled out from under the weight of Nez.

Nez lay on his back, arms and legs sprawled. Chee looked at him and looked away. He picked up the extinguisher, sprayed the burning places on the officer's trousers. He used what was left in the tank to put out the fire. "Running on fumes," Nez had said. That was lucky. Chee had seen enough car fires to know what a full tank would do. Lucky? Fumes had provided enough fire to kill Delbert Nez.

He was on the radio, calling this in to Ship Rock, asking for help, before he was fully aware of the pain of his own burns.

"There was blood, too," Chee was saying. "He might have been shot. I think blood on the back of his shirt, and blood on the front, too."

Captain Largo happened to be in, doing his perpetual paperwork. While Chee was saying that, Largo took over the radio in the Ship Rock dispatcher's office.

"We'll send all we have from here," Largo was saying. "And from Window Rock, and we'll see if anybody from Crownpoint is patrolling out your direction. Blood still fresh?"

Chee looked at his hand and grimaced. "It's still sticky," he said. "Somewhere between slick and sticky." A chunk of skin had flapped off the palm of his hand. The door handle, he thought. That had done it. It felt like it had burned all the way to the bone.

"You saw no other car lights?"

"One car. Just as I was leaving Red Rock a white Jeepster was turning off 33 onto the road toward Biklabito. One man in it. I think it was that Vietnamese math teacher at Ship Rock High School. I think that's his car, anyway." Chee's throat hurt. So did his lungs. So did his eyes. And his face. He felt with numb fingers. No eyebrows.

"We'll handle that part then," Largo said. "Save any looking for tracks for daylight. Do not mess anything up around the car. You got that?" Largo paused. "Do not," he repeated.

"Okay," Chee said. He wanted to end this. He wanted to go find whoever had killed Delbert Nez. He should have been with Nez. He should have gone to help him.

"You came down 33 from the west? From Red Rock? Get back on 33 and head east. All the way to 666. See if you can pick up anything that way. If the guy had a vehicle that's the only way he could have gone." Largo paused. "Unless he was your Vietnamese schoolteacher."

Chee didn't get all the way to U.S. Highway 666. Three miles east of the intersection, the high beams of his headlights reflected from the back of a man walking down the asphalt. Chee braked and stared. The man was walking erratically down the center of the westbound lane. He was bareheaded, his gray hair tied in a bun, his rain-soaked shirt plastered to his back. He seemed totally oblivious of Chee's headlights, now just a few yards behind him. Without a backward glance, with no effort to move to the side of the road, he walked steadily onward, swinging something in his right hand, zigzagging a little, but with the steady, unhurried pace of a man who has walked great distances, who will walk great distances more.

Chee pulled up beside him, rolled down his window. The object the man was swinging was a squat bottle, held by the neck. "*Yaa'eh t'eeh!*" Chee shouted, the standard Navajo greeting. The man ignored him, plodding steadily down the asphalt. As he moved past the police car and back into the glare of the headlights Chee saw he had something bulky stuck under his belt in the back of his trousers. It looked like the butt of a pistol.

Chee unsnapped his own pistol, took it out of its holster, and laid it on the seat beside him. He touched the siren button, producing a sudden howling. The gray-haired man seemed not to hear it.

Chee picked up the mike, raised Ship Rock, gave his location. "I have a male, about five feet eight inches tall, elderly, gray-haired, walking down the westbound lane away from the Nez site. He has what appears to be a pistol stuck under his belt and what appears to be a whiskey bottle in his right hand and is acting in a peculiar manner."

"Peculiar manner," the dispatcher said.

"I think he's drunk," Chee said. "He acts like he doesn't hear me or see me."

"Subject is drunk," the dispatcher said.

"Maybe," Chee said. "I will apprehend him now."

Which might be easier said than done, he thought. He pulled the patrol car past the walker and spun it around so its lights shone directly into the man's face. He got out with his pistol in his hand. He felt dizzy. Everything was vague.

"Hold it right there," Chee said.

The walker stopped. He looked intently at Chee, as if trying to bring him into focus. Then he sighed and sat on the pavement. He screwed the cap off the bottle, and took a long, gurgling drink. He looked at Chee again and said:

"Baa yanisin, shiyaazh."

"You are ashamed?" Chee repeated. His voice choked. "Ashamed!" With his good hand he reached over the walker's shoulder, jerked the pistol out of the man's belt. He sniffed the muzzle of the barrel and smelled burned powder. He checked the cylinders. All six contained cartridges, but three of the cartridges were empty. They had been fired. He jammed the pistol under his belt, snatched the bottle out of the walker's hand, and hurled it into the sagebrush beside the road.

"Dirty coyote," Chee said in Navajo. "Get up." His voice was fierce.

The man stared up at him, expression puzzled. The glare of the headlights reflected off the streaks of rainwater running down his face, dripping from his hair, from his eyebrows.

"Get up!" Chee screamed.

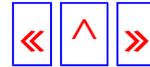
He jerked the man to his feet, hurried him to the patrol car, searched him quickly for another weapon, took a pocketknife and some coins from a front pocket and a worn wallet from his hip pocket. He handcuffed him, conscious of the man's thin, bony wrists, conscious of the numbness in his own right hand, and the pain in his left palm. He helped the man into the backseat, closed the door behind him, and stood for a moment looking through the glass at him.

"Shiyaazh," the man said again. *"Baayani-sin." My son, I am ashamed.*

Chee stood with his head bowed, the rain beating against his shoulders. He wiped the back of his hand across his wet face and licked his lips. The taste was salty.

Then he walked into the sagebrush, looking for the bottle. It would be needed as evidence.

Chapter 3



THERE WAS NOTHING Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn dreaded more than this—this unpleasant business of pretending to help people he could not possibly help. But those involved today were a family in Emma's clan, his in-laws, people from Bitter Water clan. By the Navajos' extended definition of kinship, they were Emma's brothers and sisters. He'd rarely heard Emma speak of them but that was beside the point. It was beside the point, too, that Emma would never have asked him to interfere. Certainly not in this case, with one of their own policemen murdered. She would have tried to help them herself, though. Tried very quietly—and she would have been no less impotent than Leaphorn. But Emma was dead now and that left only him.

"We know he didn't kill that policeman," Mary Keeyani had said. "Not Ashie Pinto."

By the white man's way of reckoning kinship, the Keeyani woman was Ashie Pinto's niece. In fact, she was the daughter of Ashie's sister, which gave her among the Turning Mountain People the same status as a daughter. She was a small, bony woman dressed in her old-fashioned, traditional, going-to-town best. But the long-sleeved velvet blouse hung on her loosely, as if borrowed from fatter times, and she wore only a single bracelet of narrow silver and a squash blossom necklace which used very little turquoise. She sat stiffly upright in the blue plastic chair across from Leaphorn's desk, looking embarrassed and uncomfortable.

While Mary Keeyani explained her relationship to Ashie Pinto, and therefore to Hosteen Pinto's problem, in the proper fashion of a traditional Navajo, Louisa Bourebonette had not explained herself at all. She sat next to Mary Keeyani, looking determined.

"There is absolutely no doubt that this is all some sort of mistake," Louisa Bourebonette said in a slow, precise, slightly southern voice. "But we haven't had any success talking with the FBI. We tried to talk to someone at the Farmington office and then we went to Albuquerque. They simply won't discuss it. And we don't know who to get to look for evidence to prove he's innocent. We thought we could hire a private detective. We thought maybe you could recommend someone who would be reliable."

Louisa Bourebonette had given Leaphorn her card. He picked it up now and glanced at it again.

LOUISA BOUREBONETTE, PH.D.
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, AMERICAN STUDIES
NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY
FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

This wasn't the information he wanted. He wanted to know how this trim, gray-haired, sharp-eyed woman was connected to the sorrowful business of Delbert Nez, a young man murdered and an old man destroyed. It was partly the wisdom Leaphorn had accumulated in a long life of police work that people have reasons for whatever they do—and the more effort required, the stronger the reason must be. Among Navajos, family is an overpowering reason.

Bourebouette was not Navajo. What she was doing required a lot of effort. He put the card in his desk drawer.

"Have you talked to Hosteen Pinto's attorney?"

"She didn't seem to know much," Bourebouette said. She made a small, self-deprecatory face and shook her head. "Of course, they turned Mr. Pinto over to someone brand new in the job. She'd just moved in from Washington. Had just been hired. She told us the Federal Public Defender's office had two investigators who might be helpful. But..."

Professor Bourebouette let the sentence trail off, intending to let the skepticism in her tone finish it. Leaphorn sat silently behind his desk. He glanced at her. And away. Waiting.

Bourebouette shrugged. "But I got the impression that she didn't think they would be very helpful. I don't think she knew them well yet. In fact, she didn't give us much reason to believe that Mr. Pinto will be well represented."

Leaphorn knew one of the federal defender cops. A good, solid, hardworking Hispano named Felix Sanchez. He used to be with the El Paso police department and he knew how to collect information. But there wasn't much of anything Sanchez could do to help these women. And nothing Leaphorn could do, either. He could give them the names of private detectives in Farmington, or Flagstaff, or Albuquerque. White men. What could they do? What could anyone do? An old man had been turned mean by whiskey and had killed a policeman. Why waste what little money his family might have? Or this abrasive white woman's money. How did she fit into this?

"If you hire a private detective it's going to be expensive," Leaphorn said. "He would want some money in advance as a retainer. I'd guess at least five hundred dollars. And you'd be paying his expenses. Mileage, meals, motels, things like that. And so much an hour for his fee."

"How much?" Professor Bourebouette asked.

"I'm not sure. Maybe twenty-five, thirty dollars an hour."

Mrs. Keeyani sucked in her breath. She looked stricken. Dr. Bourebouette put a comforting hand on Mrs. Keeyani's arm.

"That's about what I'd expected," Professor Bourebouette said, in a stiff, unnatural-sounding voice. "We can pay it. Who would you recommend?"

"It would depend," Leaphorn said. "What do you—"

Professor Bourebouette interrupted him.

"One would expect, or should expect if she didn't know better, that you people would take care of this yourselves. That the family wouldn't have to hire someone to find out the facts in a murder case."

The anger left Leaphorn with nothing to say. So he said the obvious.

"In a case like this, a felony committed on a reservation, the jurisdiction..."

She held up her hand. "The Federal Bureau of Investigation has the jurisdiction. We know that. We've already been told, and we knew it already, being reasonably intelligent. But after all, one of your own men was killed." A trace of sarcasm crept into Bourebouette's tone. "Aren't you a little bit curious about who actually killed him?"

Leaphorn felt himself flushing. Surely this arrogant white woman didn't expect him to answer that. Not in the presence of the murderer's niece.

But the professor was waiting for an answer. Let her wait. Leaphorn waited himself. Finally he said: "Go on."

"Since you don't seem to be investigating, and since the Federal Bureau of Investigation is content to simply bring Ashie Pinto to trial without any effort to

find the actual criminal, we hope you can at least give us some advice about who to hire. Somebody honest."

Leaphorn cleared his throat. He was trying to imagine this haughty woman in the beautifully finished office of the agent-in-charge at Albuquerque. Nothing but politeness and good manners there, he was sure.

"Yes," he said. "That's what we were discussing. And to give you that advice I must know some things. What do you have to tell this private detective? What can you give him to work on? Would it be leads he'd be following on the Reservation - around where Hosteen Pinto lived? Or around Ship Rock and Red Rock where the - where it happened? In other words, what do you know that can help? What do you know that would help him find a witness, something to prove, for example, that Hosteen Pinto was somewhere else when this crime happened? What can you give him to give him a place to start looking?"

Leaphorn paused, thinking he shouldn't pull himself into this. It was not his case, not his business. Interfering was certain to cause offense in a department that wanted the death of a brother officer balanced with a conviction of his killer. He shouldn't open the door he was about to open. He should simply tell these women he couldn't help them. Which just happened to be the sad truth. Still, Mary Keeyani was Emma's kin. And, still, there were some unanswered questions in that Nez business—as much as he knew about it.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "if you have any useful information—any witnesses, anything that would lead to concrete evidence that the FBI wouldn't listen to—you can tell me. I'll see to it that the Bureau pays the proper attention. Anything you know."

"We know he didn't do it," Bourebonette said. But the anger was used up now. She attempted a small, wan smile. "All we can tell you is *why* we know he couldn't have killed the policeman, and that's nothing more concrete than telling you about the kind of man Ashie Pinto is. Always has been."

But he did kill a man, Leaphorn was thinking, a long time ago. If I remember - what I read in that report, he was convicted, years ago, went to prison for killing a man.

"Are you a relative?" he asked Bourebonette.

"I am a friend," Bourebonette said.

Leaphorn looked at her over his glasses, waiting for more than that.

"For twenty-five years," she added. "At least."

"Ah," Leaphorn said.

Professor Bourebonette looked impatient, as if it probably wasn't worth her time to explain. But she decided to.

"My interest is in comparative mythology. The evolution of myth inside cultures. The evolution of myth as cultures meet and intermix. The relationship of a society's mythology with its economic base. Its environment. Mr. Pinto has been one of my informants. For years." She paused.

Leaphorn glanced at her. Was she finished? No. She was remembering.

"He wouldn't kill anyone," she added. "He has a great sense of humor. A great memory for the funny things. A great memory for everything." She looked into Leaphorn's eyes and said it slowly, as if he was the judge. As if he was the jury. Could whiskey not make a killer out of a funny man, just as it did of sad men and angry men?

"He has a great sense of humor," Bourebonette repeated.

It didn't prove anything, Leaphorn thought. But it was interesting. It was also interesting that she was telling him this. A long way to come, a lot of time used,

a lot of money to be spent if she was serious about hiring an investigator. And a very flimsy explanation of why she was doing it.

And so Leaphorn had asked the Turning Mountain woman and the professor to wait. He called downstairs and asked for the file marked HOMICIDE; DELBERT NEZ.

He had been away when it happened, waiting in a motel room in Phoenix to be called as a witness in a case being tried on appeal in the federal court there. Even so, he remembered a lot of it. He had read about it every day in the Phoenix *Gazette* and the *Arizona Republic*, of course. He had called the Ship Rock subagency station and talked to Captain Largo about it. The Navajo Tribal Police included only about 110 sworn officers, making the murder of any one of them not only memorable but close and personal. He had barely known Delbert Nez and remembered him as a small, quiet, neat young officer. But, like Leaphorn, Nez had worked out of the Window Rock office and Leaphorn had seen him often. Nez had been trying to grow a mustache. That was not an easy task for Navajos, with their lack of facial hair, and his sparse growth had provoked teasing and ribald jokes.

Leaphorn had known the arresting officer much better. Jim Chee. He had run across Chee several times on other investigations. An unusually bright young man. Clever. Some good qualities. But he had what might be a fatal flaw for a policeman. He was an individualist, following the rules if and when they agreed with him. On top of that, he was a romantic. He even wanted to be a medicine man. Leaphorn smiled at the idea. A Tribal Policeman-Shaman. The two professions were utterly incongruous.

Leaphorn found himself wondering if he had been Chee's first client. After a tough case, in the awful malaise that had followed Emma's death, he'd hired Chee to do a Blessing Way for him. An impulsive decision—unusual for him. He'd done it partly to give the young man a chance to try his hand as a shaman and partly as a gesture toward Emma's people. The Yazzies were Bitter Water clansmen and traditionalists. The ceremony would be sort of an unspoken apology for the hurt he must have caused them. He'd left Emma's mother's place on the second morning after they'd carried the body out into the canyon—unable to endure the full four days of silent withdrawal among her relatives that tradition required. It had been rude, and he'd regretted it. And so he had called Agnes and told her he'd hired a singer. He asked her to arrange the ceremony. She had gladly done it, not needing a reminder that his own clan, the Slow Talking Dinee, was now scattered and almost extinct, or that there was little left of his own family. He'd been uneasy around Agnes. Agnes had never married and, as Emma's sister, he would have been expected to marry her under the old tradition.

He glanced up at the two women waiting patiently across the desk and then looked back at the report. But he was thinking of Officer Chee, his hair tied in a knot at the back of his head arranging his equipment on the swept earthen floor of the Yazzie hogan. Chee had been nervous, showing Leaphorn where to sit with his back against the west wall of the hogan, spreading a small rug in front of him. Then Chee had extracted from his deerskin *jish* the little leather sack that was his Four Mountain bundle, two pairs of "talking prayersticks," a snuff can containing flint arrow points, and a half dozen pouches of pollen. He had solemnly formed the shape of footprints on the earth and marked on them with the pollen the symbols of the sunrays on which Leaphorn would walk. Beyond Chee, through the hogan doorway to the east he could see the rugged ramparts of the Carrizo Mountains reflecting the rosy twilight. He had smelled the pinon smoke from the cooking fires of Emma's kinfolds and of his own friends who had come to join him in this venture into the spirit world of his people.

At that moment he had wished desperately for a way to call it all off. He was a hypocrite. He did not believe that the ritual poetry that Officer Jim Chee would chant, or the dry paintings he would form on the hogan floor, would control the powers and force them to restore Joe Leaphorn to a life with "beauty all around him." The beauty had gone somewhere up in the canyon rocks with Emma's body. Gone forever. He wanted only to follow her.

But there had been no way out of it. And on the second dawn, after the long night of chanting, he had sucked in the four great ceremonial breaths of cold morning air feeling different than he had felt for weeks. It had not cured him, but it had started the healing. He could thank Shaman Jim Chee for that, he guessed. Or for part of it. But Officer Jim Chee was another matter. If Officer Chee had done his duty, Delbert Nez might still be alive.

"Shot high in the left chest," the report said. "Apparently at very close range."

Leaphorn glanced up at Mary Keeyani and the professor. "Sorry I'm taking so long," he said.

"There is time enough," Mary Keeyani said.

Captain Largo had told him that Chee wanted to resign after the homicide. Getting Nez out of the car, Chee had been burned on both hands, one arm, one leg, and the chest. Largo had gone to the hospital at Farmington to see him. Largo was an old friend. He'd told Leaphorn about it.

"He didn't just offer to resign," Largo had told Leaphorn. "He insisted on it. He gave me his badge. Said he'd screwed up. That he should have gone to assist Nez when he knew Nez was in pursuit. And of course he should have gone."

"Why the devil didn't he go?" Leaphorn had asked. "The silly son-of-a-bitch. What was his excuse?"

"He didn't offer any excuses," Largo had said, his voice resenting Leaphorn's judgmental tone. "But I reminded him that his report showed Nez had been laughing. From what little he heard on the radio Nez wasn't taking it seriously. Like it was a joke. And I told him he couldn't resign anyway. He can't resign until we get Pinto tried."

Thinking of that conversation now as he turned the page in the report, Leaphorn remembered that Largo had some sort of vague clan kinship link with Officer Chee. At least he'd heard that. Navajo Tribal Police regulations prohibited nepotism in the chain of command. But the rules were just picked up from *biligaana* personnel regulations. The white rules didn't recognize clan connections.

The next sheet was the report of Sergeant Eldon George. When George arrived he had found Chee sprawled in the front seat of his vehicle, half-unconscious from shock. Pinto was asleep on the back seat, handcuffed. George had attempted to treat Chee's burns with his first aid kit. Another Navajo Police unit had arrived, and a San Juan County Sheriff's car, and a New Mexico State Police patrolman and then the ambulance that Chee had called to pick up Nez. Instead, it had taken Officer Chee. Pinto had been transported to the county jail at Aztec and booked on an assault charge—the toughest rap possible for a crime committed on federal trust land until the federals got involved and filed their felony homicide complaint.

Leaphorn glanced up at Mrs. Keeyani. She sat with *her* hands clenched in her lap, lower lip caught between her teeth, watching him.

"I must refresh my memory before I can tell you anything," he said.

Mrs. Keeyani nodded.

The next page reminded Leaphorn that Ashie Pinto had not made a statement. When apprehended, he had said, according to the report:

"Officer, I have done something shameful."

Sounded stilted. Leaphorn considered it. Pinto would have spoken to Chee in Navajo, probably. Chee, probably no better than half-conscious, would have passed along a translation to George. George had jotted it into his notebook, retyped it into his report. What had Pinto actually said?

According to the report, nothing else. He had admitted nothing, denied nothing, remained absolutely silent, refusing to answer any question except to confirm his identity with a nod, declining to call a lawyer, to name anyone who he might wish to be informed of his arrest. When asked to submit to the taking of a blood sample, "Subject Pinto was seen to nod in the affirmative."

The test showed a blood alcohol level of 0.211. The percentage of alcohol in the blood that made one formally and legally drunk in New Mexico was 0.10.

There followed the Federal Bureau of Investigation report dated eleven days following the arrest. Leaphorn scanned it. Ballistics confirmed that the bullet fired into the chest of Nez had come from the pistol confiscated from Pinto, a .38 caliber revolver. It confirmed that holes in Pinto's trousers were caused by burns. There was more, including the autopsy. Leaphorn knew what it said. Nez had been alive when the fire suffocated him. Probably unconscious, but alive. Leaphorn sighed, turned to the next page. It summarized a statement taken from Chee at the hospital. He scanned it quickly. Familiar stuff. But wait. He lingered on a paragraph. Reread it.

"Officer Chee said that for several weeks Nez had been interested in apprehending an unidentified subject who had been vandalizing and defacing a basaltic outcrop east of Red Rock and south of Ship Rock. Chee said he believed from what he heard on the radio that Nez had seen this person and expected to apprehend the subject. He said the radio signal was breaking up but that he heard Nez laughing and Nez did not appear to want a backup."

Leaphorn snorted, an angry sound and unintentionally loud. He glanced up to see if the women had noticed. They had.

He covered his embarrassment with a question. "Did anyone tell you about the circumstances?"

"They said he was arrested out there where it happened," Mrs. Keeyani said. "They said he had the gun that killed that policeman."

"Did they tell you that he hasn't denied it?" Leaphorn asked. But he was thinking of Jim Chee. Irritated. Nez did not appear to want a backup. Whether he wanted one or not, the rules said Chee should be there. But that was Chee's reputation. He made his own rules. Smart. Unusually smart. But not a team player. So he was sitting in the trading post at Red Rock drinking coffee while Nez, alone, was dealing with a homicidal drunk armed with a pistol.

"I don't know what my uncle told them," Mary Keeyani said. She shook her head.

"But I know he didn't do it. Not Hosteen Pinto. He wouldn't kill anybody."

Leaphorn waited, watching her face, giving her a chance to say more. She simply sat, looking down at her hands.

Finally she said: "A long, long time ago, before I was born... He got in a fight then, when he was young, and a man was killed. But he was a wild boy then, and drunk. Now he is an old man. He doesn't drink now. Not for years."

It was not something to argue about. Instead Leaphorn said, "He won't tell them anything at all. That's what I'm told. Not a word. Not even to his lawyer."

Mrs. Keeyani looked at her hands. "That wasn't his gun," she said. "My uncle had an old .22 rifle. A single-shot rifle. He still has that. It's in his hogan."

Leaphorn said nothing. This interested him. That pistol Pinto had was a Ruger, an expensive model and not what you would expect a man like Pinto to own. On the other hand, there could be a thousand explanations of why he did own it.

"Perhaps you didn't know about this pistol," Leaphorn said.

Now it was Mrs. Keeyani's turn to be surprised. "He is my mother's brother," she said. "He never got married. His place was there at our grandmother's place behind Yon Dot Mountain."

Leaphorn needed no more explanation. If Ashie Pinto had owned an expensive Ruger revolver, his relatives would have known it. He glanced back at the FBI report, looking for the name of the investigating officer. Agent Theodore Rostik. He'd never heard of Rostik, which meant he was a newcomer to the Gallup office—either fresh and green from the FBI Academy, or an older agent exiled as a lost cause. Up-and-comers in the agency were not sent to places like Farmington, or Fargo, or Gallup, or other towns considered Siberian by the Bureau hierarchy. These were the billets for new men without political connections in the agency, or those who had fallen from grace—perhaps having caused bad publicity (the agency's mortal sin) or shown signs of original thinking. For Leaphorn the point was that Rostik might be unusually stupid, or unusually smart—either of which might cause his exile. But most likely he was simply green.

"I'll tell you what I think you should do," he said to Mrs. Keeyani without looking up from the report. "Hosteen Pinto has a lawyer who may be green but will be smart. The Federal Public Defender just hires the smart ones. Work with her. Tell her the strange things that trouble you. She will send out one of the investigators to learn the facts. I know one of them personally, a very good man. You should work with them."

Leaphorn read on, not looking up, waiting for a response. He heard Mrs. Keeyani shift in her chair. But the voice he heard was Dr. Bourebonette's. "Are they Navajos?" she asked. "Would they understand that Hosteen Pinto's family would certainly know if Hosteen Pinto owned that pistol?"

"Maybe not," Leaphorn said. He didn't look up because he didn't want to show his resentment. Mrs. Keeyani he could tolerate. He respected her reason for being here—even though it wasted her time and his. Professor Bourebonette was another matter. But it was an astute question.

"Probably they wouldn't understand that," he agreed.

He was looking for something in the report that would tell him how Ashie Pinto had gotten from his place behind Yon Dot Mountain to Navajo Route 33 south of Ship Rock, New Mexico. Two hundred miles, more or less. Nothing in the report mentioned an abandoned car or pickup.

Dr. Bourebonette cleared her throat politely. "Does that report tell how Hosteen Pinto got over into New Mexico?"

"I was looking for that," Leaphorn said, glancing up at her. "Do you know?"

"Someone came and got him," she said.

"Who?"

Dr. Bourebonette glanced at Mary Keeyani.

"I don't know," Mary Keeyani said. "But I know somebody came and got him. I had gone over to the store at the Gap to get some kerosene for the light. And my husband, he was out with the sheep. Everybody was gone somewhere except my youngest daughter. She had come home on the school bus and she'd gone out to catch her horse and go help with the sheep and she saw dust from the car."

"It wasn't Pinto's car?"

Mrs. Keeyani laughed. "Hosteen Pinto's car broke a long time ago," she said. "The chickens sleep in it." Her amusement left as quickly as it had come. "She was up on the side of the hill with the horse and all she saw was the dust and maybe just a glimpse. It had come from Hosteen Pinto's shack. The road, it runs right by my mother's hogan and past our house and then out toward Twentynine Mile Canyon and connects up with the road to Cedar Ridge Trading Post. She said it might be a light-colored car, or maybe a pickup, or maybe it was just dusty."

"When was this?"

"It was the evening before Hosteen Pinto got arrested over in New Mexico."

Leaphorn flipped back through the report. He found nothing about any of this.

"Did a policeman come to talk to you?"

"A young white man," she said. "With those little spots on his face. And a Navajo to translate for him."

Freckles, Leaphorn thought. A culture unafflicted with freckles has no noun for them. "What did they want to know?"

"They asked about the pistol. They asked about what Hosteen Pinto was doing over there. Where did Pinto get the pistol? Where did he get the two fifty-dollar bills he had in his pocket? Did Hosteen Pinto know Delbert Nez—the man they say he shot? They asked questions like they thought Hosteen Pinto was bootlegging wine. Like how did Hosteen Pinto act when he was drunk? Did he get into fights? How did he make a living? Was he a bootlegger?" Mrs. Keeyani had been looking down at her hands. Now she looked up. "They seemed to think for sure he was a bootlegger." She shook her head.

"How did you answer?"

"I said maybe the fifty-dollar bills were his fee. From the one who came and got him."

"Fee?"

"He had his crystals with him," Mrs. Keeyani said. "When he was younger he used to work finding things for people. When I was a little girl they would come from as far away as Tuba City, and even Kayenta and Leupp. He was pretty famous then."

"He was a crystal gazer," Leaphorn said. He leaned forward. If this man was working as a shaman, maybe there was more to this than just another senseless, sordid whiskey killing. "He still worked at it?"

"Not much." She thought about it. "Last year he found a horse for a man who works over at Copper Mine, and then he did a little work for a white man. And he would work with Dr. Bourebonette." She nodded at the professor. "That was about all I know about."

"What had the white man lost?"

"I think he was hunting old-time stories."

Leaphorn wasn't sure what she meant. He waited for an explanation. None came.

"Was Hosteen Pinto someone the anthropologists came to see to learn the old stories? Like Professor Bourebonette?"

"Yes. Many times in the old days. Not so much now. He learned most of them from Narbona Begay I think. The brother of his mother."

"You think it was this white man looking for stories who came for him the day before the shooting?"