

# Free

A Short Novel  
by  
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## Chapter 1

“Sometime I really hate this place,” Ike thought to himself. It had been four months since he had left all he had known back on the farm in Louisiana. He, Jimmy, and Frank had decided to move out to Arizona with some guys they met at a party. They had promised food, shelter, women, and smoke. So far, there was almost enough junk food to keep you from starving and eleven people in a two room house that almost worked. The only women around had been bitchy half breeds that only wanted to hang out as long as you had money to buy beer. The weed, when it could be found, was twice as expensive as it had been back in Louisiana.

“Fuck this, I'm going for a ride.” Ike grabbed his keys and wallet. He opened the ragged piece of leather and looked in the torn pouch where he hid his money.

Twelve dollars.

“Sweet,” he thought. “And the the bike is full of gas. I'm gonna go for a few days.”

Grabbing his backpack, he snuck into the kitchen and loaded it full of junk food and hot cans of soda. He ran back to his bed where the few possessions he had were stored and grabbed two pairs of socks and the twenty sack of bud he had hidden and shoved them in the front pouch.

As he walked out the front door, Jimmy and Frank looked up from the movie they had been watching. “Where you going?” they asked.

“I dunno. I'll be back in a few days.”

“You got a stogie before you leave, man?” Jimmy asked him.

“Nope, I'm out,” Ike lied and slammed the door behind him.

He kicked his Honda hard and she sprang to life. It was such an amazing machine, a 1969 CB450. Ike and his dad had built it when he was only eight.

It was almost finished when his dad got run over.

Ike's grandpa had kept it running until Ike turned sixteen, then gave it to him as a birthday present. He had driven it all through high school, to the prom, and to graduation. When Jimmy and Frank sold their dirt bikes to pay for the journey to Arizona, Ike instead sold everything else and rode the CB. He used his graduation gift money and the leftover trip money to live on once

he got out west.

The Honda swung out onto the open road and Ike rolled the throttle. “God, it feels good to get out of here,” he thought as he watched the common house disappear in his mirror. “I might ride out to New Mexico.”

A flash in his eye and he remembered the ride through to Arizona. It had been nighttime and a full moon. He had taken Route 66 once he got into New Mexico, while everyone else continued on I-40. The ride through the reservation had been amazing. The grass he had smoked in Albuquerque overtook him and he had felt something. At one point he could have sworn he heard Native chanting, but dismissed it as a good bud high.

A feeling consumed his every being and he knew he had to return there.

## Chapter 2

It was dark when Ike saw the sign marking the Navajo Nation border. He saw a dirt road to his left and a small sign that said nature trail. The bike slowed and made the turn effortlessly. The glow of his old tungsten headlight lit up the path in between the plateaus and up the mountain. The road forked and he took a left, down into a dirt valley surrounded by high ridges.

The Honda shut down for the night and it was quiet, only a distant coyote howl and the clicking of the CB's engine as it cooled. Ike gathered some dried scrap wood and tumbleweeds for a fire. Once he got it going, he sat down in front of the warm flames, watching it dance in the air.

“I really wish I would have brought a BB gun or a slingshot or something I could try and hunt with,” he thought, chewing some stale beef jerky and hot soda he had lifted from the house. Quickly scarfing down a Fudge Round, Ike decided to lay back and look at the stars while enjoying some grass. He tried really hard to look for constellations, but couldn't remember anything other than the Dippers and Orion, and he couldn't even remember what Orion looked like.

Taking another pull from his spliff, he thought about life. “Where am I going? I have no way to support myself and I'm over a thousand miles away from anyone I know.” Tears filled his eyes as he thought about his mom. He had sent home a few letters, telling her how great everything was and a lot of other lies. Ike felt bad about it, but he didn't want to tell his mom the truth.

“No way I can face that shame,” was the thought in his head.

Crack.

“What the fuck was that?” Ike sat straight up, his half smoked joint in between his lips and quickly grabbing the shaved pool cue he carried for protection. Sweeping his eyes left to right throughout the small valley, he saw only the reflection of the flames flickering on the ridge walls.

“Damn rabbit,” he thought. “I’ll make you my dinner if you come out in the open.” He laid back down and closed his eyes. He could feel the warmth of the fire on his face and he saw a red glow through his closed eyes. “I could live like this. I just need some cash for gas and I’ll hunt my food.” He took another draw from his smoke and considered it further.

“It could work.” The voice was breathy, but husky at the same time. Ike jumped to his feet, wildly brandishing his cue in total readiness and mild fear.

“What is...” Ike began but his voice trailed off. His eyes were wide, locked on an old man standing along the ridge wall. He was Native, but wearing extremely old clothes, like originals from the Long Walk or something. The old man locked eyes with Ike from across the small canyon and again he heard the breathy, husky voice.

“Come with me.”

Ike was still staring at the old man in a daze when he realized that he was walking in the direction he had been beckoned. “What the hell am I doing?” he thought to himself but never broke his stride, following the guide into a narrow trail between the ridges. He followed for what seemed like hours and had lost sight of his camp a long time back. The path was only lit by the light of the full moon, yet he felt oddly safe following this ancient man who had appeared out of nowhere.

They made a hard left on the trail into a small clearing. He scanned the walls and found the old man standing on a rock above him, across the clearing. Ike suddenly felt very afraid and wondered why he was there in the first place. He wanted to turn back to camp and forget this whole thing, but as before, he was walking across the dirt towards the ancient one without control. As he approached the edge of the clearing he saw on the ground a skull amidst a pile of bones. He looked up at the old man and once again heard his voice.

“Honor me.” He motioned to a cave above him with his wrinkled old

hand.

“Holy shit, this guy want me to bury him in this cave,” was the thought that screamed through his head. He closed his eyes. A warm feeling swept through him that warmed him even in the cool fall night. He knew what he had to do.

## Chapter 3

It took a little over two hours for him to carry the bones up the ridge to the cave and place them in what he thought was a respectful and honorable position. He stood outside the cave looking out into the clearing when he saw the old man standing where the bones had been below him. He pointed to a large pile of rocks next to Ike on the ridge, the slowly moved his wrinkled pointed finger to the mouth of the cave.

“Great,” he thought to himself, but set to work sealing the cave as he had been asked. It turned out to be easier than he thought, as the rocks were a lot lighter than he had previously anticipated.

When he'd finished, the sun was just coming up. He stood in front of the cave overlooking everything. With the sunlight, he could see where he'd camped. “Wow, I walked a long way.” As hunger swept his mind, he began making his way down the ridge.

As Ike was walking across the clearing back toward his campsite, the old man appeared once again. “Your reward will be great,” he said, then faded away like sand in the wind.

Ike returned to camp to find that raccoons had made their way in and destroyed all his food. “Fucking great,” he thought. Anger swept through him as he slit a cigarette and thought about the night's events.

He stopped. “I really helped someone that was dead,” he said to himself. “That's insane.”

He dumped all the bad food and wrappers into the coals from the nights campfire and made sure they burned. As he was loading up the Honda, he looked at the log he had been lying on the night before. There was a dark green strap hanging out of the end of the log that he hadn't noticed in the darkness. He set down his backpack and crouched by the log.

“It's an old Army bag,” he thought as he slid it out from it hiding place.

It was about the size of a large woman's purse, OD green, with a faint US Army and a red cross printed on it. He lifted the flap and stared.

And stared.

He blinked several times to make sure he was seeing what he was seeing.

Gold coins!

Ike picked up a handful and looked at them. 1980, US Gold One Ounce. He almost passed out. Quickly loading the coins in his backpack, he jumped on the bike and blasted down the nature trail back towards the highway.

His heart was still fluttering when he stopped at the border for gas. He tried to keep the jingling coins quiet as he paid the cashier and pumped his gas. He chugged the last can of hot soda he had before shooting back onto the interstate towards Phoenix.

As he saw the buildings of downtown Phoenix come into view, he suddenly got very happy. It was only four o'clock, which gave him plenty of time to go to the gold and silver exchange. He pulled into the pawnshop where he had been a few times, pawning stuff for the Natives he lived with. Nervously, Ike dug five coins from his backpack and walked through the door.

## Chapter 4

\$3750. That's what those five coins were worth. And he probably had two hundred of them!

"I'm rich! I can take off!" he screamed to himself. His head swimming, he rode down the block to the Marriott, where he got a room for two days, cash.

That night, Ike slept good for the first time since leaving Louisiana. When he finally woke up, it was two o'clock the next afternoon. He ordered a pizza and soda and sat on his bed and counted his loot. There was way more than he had previously thought. Three hundred and seventy three gold coins not including the five he had already cashed in. He had decided the best thing to do was to keep this whole thing quiet. When he got low on cash, he would just sell some coins.

He slept one more night at the hotel and got up first thing in the

morning. He had bought a few changes of clothes in the gift shop and lifted all the towels and soap. He loaded it all in his backpack and walked down to the parking lot. As he started the Honda and mounted her up for another nig trip, he let out a big sigh.

“Free.”

“I'm finally free.”

He kicked the twin in gear and roared off towards home.