THE PALE-FACED LIE

A TRUE STORY

DAVID CROW

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To my wife, Patty

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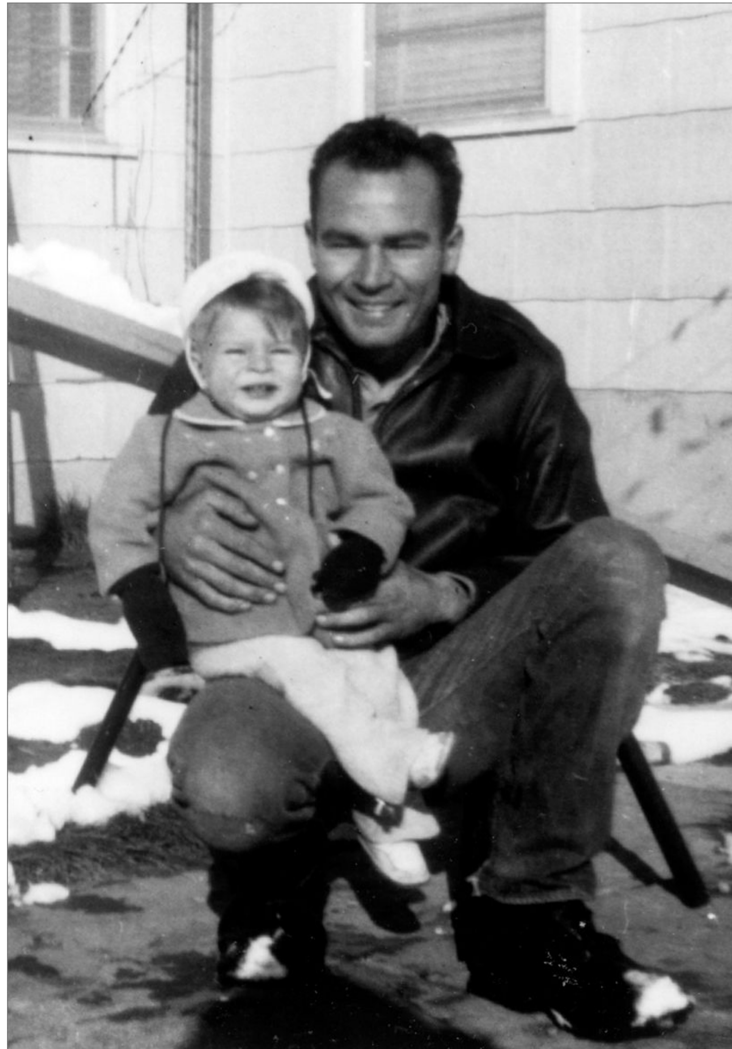
AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a true story. Some of the recollections come from my parents since I was too young to fully understand what was happening. I have followed up relentlessly with family members, neighbors, classmates, and others to make sure the events depicted are as accurate as possible. In some cases, I relied on family photographs and public records to verify my memories. The names and identifying details of some individuals and places have been changed.

PART 1

NAVAJO STATION
1956



My dad and me (age three) in front of our house at Navajo Station on the Navajo Indian Reservation. 1955.

CHAPTER 1

I WAS THREE AND A HALF the first time my dad told me we had to get rid of my mother. On that bitter cold morning in February, he jumped up from the table after eating his usual eggs, grits, and bacon and threw on his coat. Lonnie, Sam, and I had finished our cornflakes long before he sat down.

"Thelma Lou, get David ready," he told my mother. His deep voice filled our tiny house. "He and I are going for a ride."

Mom lurched into the living room with that twitchy look she got whenever Dad asked her to do something. I sat cross-legged on the floor watching *The Little Rascals* as she jerked back and forth in front of me like a broken wind-up toy. "Get ready, David!" she shrieked.

My younger brother, Sam, still in diapers, pushed his Tonka truck across the worn carpet and giggled when Mom stumbled over his toys. Our cat, Midnight, leapt out of her way and glided to safety under a chair. As usual, Lonnie, then seven, was camped out in her room with the door closed, listening to her radio and ignoring the rest of us.

Mom always acted nervous, like something bad was going to happen. It got worse when Dad was around. Before she could touch me with her clammy hands, I ran to the closet, put on my jacket and boots, and bolted out the door.

On the front porch, I hung close to the house and shivered while Dad scraped snow and ice off our Nash Rambler, or what I called the Green Bomber. I had a nickname for everything. White smoke poured from the

exhaust and filled the air. I wished Dad would hurry up, but I would never tell him that. Behind him, the giant Navajo Compressor Station where he worked rose into the sky. Dad told me millions of pounds of natural gas flowed through the huge pipelines. They were connected to turbine engines that rumbled so loud I thought they would shake apart.

A fence surrounded the station and the twenty houses belonging to El Paso Natural Gas workers and their families. Everybody called the company EPNG for short. Our only other neighbors were rattlesnakes, stray cattle, sheep, coyotes, jackrabbits, and roadrunners. They all disappeared when it got cold. Dad said we lived on the Navajo Indian Reservation, but because we were Cherokees, we didn't have to follow any of the damn Anglo rules.

The snow blew hard, stinging my face, and I hopped around to stay warm. Dad carved out two openings on the frozen windshield, then snapped ice off the handle on the passenger door and signaled me to get in. "It's colder than a well-digger's ass, so move it," he shouted, hustling to the driver's side of the car. "We're gonna have some fun."

Dad knocked the snow from his boots and slid onto the seat. His burly arms and barrel chest seemed even more massive in his heavy work coat, the one with the familiar red-and-yellow EPNG logo. His head almost touched the ceiling.

"Let's go!" He stomped on the gas pedal and the Green Bomber sped out into the snowy Arizona desert. Just as I got up on my knees to see where we were going, he hit the brakes and jerked the steering wheel to the side, throwing me against the door, like the whirlybird ride at the Navajo fair.

"See—isn't this fun, boy?"

He stepped on the gas and we jolted forward. Seconds later, he slammed on the brakes again. I bounced up to the dashboard and underneath it,

banging my head on the hard metal. Dad laughed. “Hey, don’t break the glove compartment,” he said. “We can’t afford a new one.”

The next time, I flipped upside down, and Dad laughed some more. I crawled back onto the seat and took another nosedive when the car stopped and spun again.

“You sure as hell better be tough.” He wagged his finger at me. “I hate sissies. You’re scrawny and you can’t hear worth a damn, but you’re a determined little son of a bitch. Remember, you’re a Crow, by God, a Cherokee Indian of superior intelligence and courage.”

Dad straightened the wheel but didn’t slow down. The wipers screeched against the icy windshield as swirls of snow whipped around us. “Now it’s time for a real talk,” he said. “I have something important to say, and you need to promise not to tell anyone.” He reached over and squeezed my arm with his gigantic hand. “Got it?”

“I promise,” I blurted through nervous laughter. I grabbed the door handle to keep from falling, afraid it would turn and I’d fly out into the cold.

“We need to get rid of your mother,” Dad said, his voice low and sharp. “She’s no goddamn good, and if you grow up with her, you’ll become just as loony as she is. She’s worthless and destructive, like her whole family. She’ll ruin you. Ruin us all. You know we can’t keep her around, don’t you, boy?”

No, but I nodded anyway. He said bad things about Mom all the time, that she was a crazy, stupid, whiny bitch just like her mother and the other freeloading assholes in the Dalton family.

But he wouldn’t really get rid of her, would he? He yelled at her to go away and not come back, and sometimes he slapped her hard. Even then, she never left the EPNG compound unless Dad drove her to town. And usually things returned to normal after dinner. I could hear them laughing in their bedroom at night.

I wrapped both hands around the door handle and studied Dad's face. Below his thick, wavy black hair, a Y-shaped vein popped out on his forehead, and his large blue eyes bulged like they might explode. His mouth stretched tight. He always looked scary like that when he was angry.

Would he leave Mom at the trading post? Or on the side of the road next to the Navajo drunks? Maybe he'd put her on a bus and send her back to her mother like he threatened so many times. But Dad said her whore of a mother didn't want her. Neither did her two shiftless, alcoholic, mooching brothers. And Granddaddy Dalton could barely take care of himself.

The only time Mom went anywhere alone was when she borrowed a cup of sugar from one of the ladies in the compound—though she always dumped it down the sink when she got home. Once in a while, she dragged me with her, and I listened to her tell them that her mother was cruel and her brothers beat her up. Even her daddy couldn't save her. Clutching the ladies' hands, she would put her face close to theirs and say her life was no better now, because Dad hit her and her kids didn't behave. The women pulled away, handed Mom the sugar, and closed the door as fast as they could.

Poor Mom. She'd lie on the couch most of the day and call to Lonnie and me to do things for her. "I need help," she'd say. "I can't do this by myself." My sister would roll her eyes. Mom never had energy for anything. Sometimes she stayed in her nightgown and didn't get dressed until just before Dad got home—or not at all.

The other moms in the neighborhood weren't like that. They smiled and laughed. They packed lunches for their kids and talked to them while they waited at the bus stop. When the bus came, the moms hugged them and told them to have a good day, and then they turned around and walked back to their houses, full of energy, their arms swinging.

Not my mom.

Lonnie packed her own lunch, got her homework ready, and fixed her own breakfast. Our mom went from the bed to the couch. I felt sorry for her, but her whiny, squeaky voice made my head hurt.

If she disappeared, who would be our mom? That nasty, old Mrs. Bell from next door?

Dad slammed on the brakes and returned to spinning the car in circles. The tires crunched across the icy ground. His face was loose and relaxed again, like it was when he joked with the guys from work. My hands were tired and sweaty.

"Having fun, boy?" He laughed.

Maybe he didn't mean what he said. Maybe he wouldn't leave Mom so she couldn't find her way back home.

But he sure seemed serious about it.

DAD PROBABLY TOLD LONNIE THE SECRET TOO. My sister knew everything about our family, though she never talked about Mom other than to say she was nuts.

Lonnie was thin like Mom and had her reddish-blond hair and green eyes, but they acted nothing alike. My sister had a happy, bright face and a spring in her step. She played the piano, read constantly, and got straight As. Everyone liked her. Lonnie was full of life—and Mom flopped around like a deflated balloon.

Most mornings after Dad left for work, I ran through the house and Mom would tell me to stop yelling like a banshee. I'd kick my rubber ball, swing my bat, and throw baseballs into lamps, pictures, and the lazy Susan on the living room coffee table. Mom chased after me, trying to grab a piece of my shirt or pants, but I was too fast for her. Once I made a big enough mess, she would let me go outside.

One morning she made me stay in because it was raining. To change her mind, I climbed on top of the washer and tossed in a baseball bat during the

spin cycle. Mom came running right away, but the cylinder was already dented so bad it had to be repaired. Dad spanked me really hard for that dumbass stunt, as he called it. The marks stayed on my legs a long time.

On another rainy day, I put Midnight in the dryer after he came in soaked. He screeched like mad. When Lonnie got him out, he tore through the living room and flew onto the venetian blinds, clawing them off the windows. As soon as someone opened the door, he took off.

Lonnie slapped my face and called me a wild animal. She said all the neighbors called me that too. But I just wanted to dry him off. I didn't mean to scare him.

Dad told Mom he hoped I'd run away and join the circus.

On the mornings Mom would let me out of the house, I'd race over to the compressor station looking to break a few rules. Dad told me to get away with whatever I could. "But don't make anyone important mad at you," he said. "If you do, I'll have to punish you hard."

I would carry a small wrench from his toolbox, making believe he forgot it and needed me to bring it to him. When I crawled up the metal steps and banged the wrench on the compressor building's giant steel door, one of the workers would open it and smile down at me. Then he would turn and cup his hands around his mouth. "Go get Thurston," he'd yell above the noise.

All the guys laughed. Kids weren't allowed to go inside where the big engines lived, so Dad pretended to swat my butt. Sometimes while I was there, Dad gathered his men around to tell them stories about me. "No other boy would have the gumption to come here and knock on the door." He'd rub my head and smile. "David is the only one who would pull that kind of stunt."

Before sending me home, Dad would take the wrench from me and later return it to the same spot in his toolbox. The men would say, "See you tomorrow, sport."

When I turned four that summer, Dad started putting me through drills before he went to work. I needed to be strong and brave like our Cherokee ancestors, he said. He'd toss me into the air and hold out his hands to catch me, but then often pull them away, letting me drop to the ground. My body was covered with scrapes and bruises.

Dad would laugh. "I'm teaching you to be on guard, boy. I might not always be there to protect you."

He yelled at me when I got scared, telling me not to watch his hands. "Put your arms out to brace the fall," he said. "Protect yourself. Do I have to tell you everything? Besides, a little bump on your head won't hurt anything."

Other days, Dad tied me to the pine tree in our front yard. He'd wrap a thick, scratchy rope around my chest and ankles and tug on it hard to make a tight knot.

"Try to get out of that, you clever little bastard." He would turn and walk away.

"Dad, please untie me . . . please . . . please."

"Not a chance. I don't want you to be afraid of anything—except me," he'd say over his shoulder.

I would squirm and squirm, but that never worked. The rope burned my skin and pulled snug like a Chinese finger trap. Soon my body started shaking, and I struggled to breathe. The tears came next, dropping on the rope. I didn't feel like a brave Cherokee.

If someone walked by, I'd yell out, "Hey! I tied myself to a tree by accident. Can you help me?" I forced out a laugh, but it sounded strange, kind of ragged and uneven.

Often Mr. Bell came over and untied the rope. "I know your dad did this," he said softly. "And what he's doing is wrong."

If Mr. Bell didn't set me free, Mom would scurry from the house and do it as soon as the Rambler was out of sight.

CHAPTER 2

Dad worked directly under Champ, the guy who ran the whole plant. Champ was my best buddy. He told me that many times.

When no one was looking, I would carry a wooden milk crate over to his big red EPNG truck parked next to the compressor station, climb into the bed, and lie on my stomach, waiting for him to drive off to survey the miles of pipelines. Then I'd jump up and bang on the back window. Champ laughed and let me sit beside him in the cab.

We ate sunflower seeds and drank the Cokes he kept in a cooler on the floorboard. I rested my feet on it and talked nonstop, asking about turbine engines, roadrunners, rattlesnakes, or anything else that popped into my head. Champ said there was a motor attached to my mouth. I giggled when he called Dad on his walkie-talkie to let him know we were patrolling the pipelines. "That mischievous son of a bitch," Dad would say, but he never minded if I was with Champ.

Though he only finished high school, Dad could outtalk anybody on any subject. Our house was full of engineering and math books, and he had read each one from start to finish. Dad knew more than all the other guys in the compound about the turbine engines and how to keep them running.

No one interrupted him, and no one ever disagreed with him. If his voice got extra loud, his men would back away and leave as soon as they could. Sometimes they laughed too hard or quick at his jokes. Still, when I brought

Dad his wrench, they would tell me he was the smartest man they'd ever met.

The men talked about gas all the time, and the smell of it was everywhere. After a while, we didn't notice unless someone visiting mentioned it. An older boy told me that EPNG used buffalo farts to make the gas smell funny. Dad called it sulfur.

"Without the odor, we can't detect a leak," he said, standing and puffing out his chest to make sure everyone paid attention to him.

We had just finished one of Mom's dinners of fried okra, roast beef, and iced tea, the same meal she served every night. Lonnie and I loved sitting at the table listening to Dad tell us how the powerful engines pushed the gas all the way to Los Angeles. Sometimes he drew pictures of them to show us how they worked. The turbines were enormous, and the inside parts moved faster than my eye could see.

"And if we can't detect a leak, an explosion will blast our dead asses clear to Mexico."

I always got a sick feeling in my stomach when Dad talked about explosions. The year before, the compressor station had blown up during a test run of some new turbines. Everyone still talked about it as though it had just happened.

The morning had begun as usual, with Mom asleep on the couch, me in front of the TV watching cartoons, and Sam in the playpen. First came a rumbling noise, and then a loud boom rocked the house, making the pictures tumble off the walls. I ran to the window as the emergency siren pierced the still air and people scattered in all directions. Midnight went berserk, tearing through the room before climbing the curtains and hanging there, his hair standing on end.

The second explosion shook the ground much harder than the first, knocking me down. Flames burst out of the station like giant orange balls, and smoke billowed high into the bright blue sky. The building disappeared

behind a black cloud. When the siren erupted in another blast, the house shook again, and I had to put my hands over my ears. The buffalo farts smelled extra nasty, like they'd caught on fire.

Mom sprang from the couch and ran around in circles, crying and shaking, as I huddled in the corner, afraid the ceiling would fall on us. Sam's eyes darted back and forth between Mom and me before he scrunched up his face and started crying too. Lonnie was in school, so it was up to me to comfort Mom, but I didn't know what to do when she dropped to the floor screaming. And the rumbling kept going on and on. Soon black smoke filled the house, and the air hung thick and heavy.

I shook Mom a few times, but that didn't help. It never did. She curled up into a ball, closed her eyes, and moaned. Then Mrs. Bell from next door burst into the living room. Her husband had worked the midnight shift and was home asleep when the station blew up.

"Thelma Lou," she said, "we don't know what happened yet. Every spare man is there to help. Thurston is probably fine. Stay calm."

No one locked their doors in the compound—we were one big family. During an emergency, all the moms and dads helped out like they were relatives. Even people who avoided Mom came over to see what they could do.

Mrs. Bell got down on the floor. "Thelma Lou, come on now, you have to get a hold of yourself." She patted her back. "We'll figure this out together."

Other neighbors streamed into the house and said nice things to Mom. Mrs. Bell helped her up to the couch and got her a glass of water. Mom shook so hard it spilled all over the floor. Dad said Mrs. Bell despised Mom, but she was kind that day, gently rubbing Mom's shoulders and trying to get her to relax. She talked to Mom like she was a little kid, asking her if Lonnie was at school. Mom nodded, her sobs coming in such big spurts it was impossible to understand her.

Finally the loud noises stopped, but the smoke and fiery clouds kept coming. Sam cried harder in the playpen, and one of the neighbors picked him up and rocked him, settling him down. He started up again a few minutes later when we heard the loud siren from a fire truck. I ran outside to see, and Midnight followed, diving under the neighbor's bushes. Mrs. Bell yelled at me to get inside, but I ignored her, and she flew out the door, her face all red, and grabbed my shirt with one hand and my cheek with the other to drag me into the house.

Mrs. Bell was one of the ladies who called me a wild animal. She smelled kind of funny, like medicine, and was always bossing people around. Her first name was Beatrice, and Dad called her Blubber Bee because she was so fat. Mr. Bell complained about me too, even though he had untied me from the tree more than once. I never saw him smile. Dad said he was a miserable henpecked son of a bitch.

By the time Champ showed up and asked for Mom, her cries had become sniffles. She was still in her robe, and her hair was messy as if she had just woken up. Her eyes twitched wildly. Dad had been badly burned, Champ said, and he was in the emergency room. Though Champ rubbed my head and smiled at me, his gray eyes were sad. He said that some of the injured men might die, but he wasn't sure about Dad.

Soon more teary-eyed neighbor ladies stopped by to check on Mom. Champ's wife drove her to the hospital, and the other ladies sat in our living room with Sam and me, whispering to one another and shaking their heads like Dad was never coming back—but I knew he would.

When Lonnie got home from school, she had tears running down her cheeks. One of the men told her what had happened. "Dad tried to close the shut-off valve for the gas, but the turbine exploded," she said, wiping her face on her sleeve. "He barely got out, and then he rushed a bunch of guys to the hospital in one of the trucks. He's alive but burned all over."

It was dark when Mom came back from the hospital. She shook so much she couldn't walk, and Champ's wife had to help her inside. "Your daddy was wrapped up like a mummy," Mom told us as she fell back onto the couch. "His chest didn't move. They said he was still alive, but he looked dead to me."

Lonnie and I cried—after all, Mom had to know if Dad was really dead.

"Thurston," Mom yelled, "it's not fair for you to die and leave me alone with the kids. You're supposed to take care of me."

She got up and went to bed. Lonnie told me to pick up the toys on the floor and then opened cans of pork and beans for dinner. I minded my seven-year-old sister better than I did my mother. After Lonnie changed Sam's diaper, fed him, and put him in his crib for the night, she tried to get Mom to eat.

For many days after that, the neighbor ladies brought food and sat with Mom. They took turns driving her to the hospital, and when she walked through the door every night, we asked if Dad was alive. She shook her head. "I don't think so, but they say he is."

One evening when she came into the house with her usual scared, frantic look, she said, "Your daddy is alive. I didn't believe it—his face was so swollen and puffy after they took the bandages off. But he called out my name, so it must have been him."

Even then, Dad couldn't leave the hospital for a long time, and the doctors wouldn't let us visit. Our germs might kill him, they told Mom.

When she finally brought him home in the Green Bomber, Lonnie and I ran to the car to meet him. Mom was right—he didn't look like our big, strong dad. His head had swelled to the size of a pumpkin, and his eyes were like tiny BBs. His forehead and nose shined bright red, and flaky skin fell off his face. He moaned in pain. Mom changed Dad's bandages, and he didn't yell at her or hit her once.

The people in the compound stayed sad for months, but Dad told us that EPNG employees understood the risks. Seven of his guys were badly burned in the explosion, and two never returned. New men replaced the injured ones, the turbine engines were repaired, and everyone went in and out of the compressor station just like before.

Dad's skin eventually healed, and he went back to work. Soon after, he started yelling at Mom again, telling her to go away.

MOST OF THE TIME MOM didn't know where I was. The neighbor ladies complained to Dad that I ran outside the entrance gate where kids weren't supposed to go. Mom needed to watch me better, they said.

"He can't wreck anything outside," he told them. "And nothing seems to hurt the little bastard." The women didn't think he was funny, but Dad didn't care. He said breaking the compound rules was good training because Cherokees always had to make their own rules to survive.

While driving their red trucks, the EPNG men would find me far from home, and they always stopped to pick me up. When they told Dad it wasn't safe for me to be out in the desert, he laughed. "Don't worry about David. He always finds his way back."

One morning, after Dad sent me home from the compressor station, I got in line for the school bus. Neither Lonnie nor the driver saw me sneak on board. When we pulled up to the elementary school in Ganado, I hid in the middle of the students as they got off the bus and walked into the building.

But I didn't get far. Lonnie ratted on me. The driver had to make the trip back to the compound with only one passenger. She yelled at me for being a bad boy. I laughed, running up and down the aisle of the empty bus.

My sister told everybody I was a snot-nosed little brat, always causing trouble. When I slipped onto the bus again, Lonnie didn't spot me until I rolled out from under one of the seats. She wanted the driver to make me

walk the twelve miles back home. And I would have done it, but I didn't have to. The driver told me that if I'd wait until first grade to get on the bus, she'd give me a Davy Crockett canteen with a compass on it. That sounded like a good deal, so I took it.

My other favorite thing to do was to go with Mom and Dad to get groceries at the Hubbell Trading Post, just down the street from the school. Nothing excited me more than to see Navajo Indians up close. All our neighbors were either Mexican or Anglo, and they never dressed the way the Navajos did when they came to town. The men braided their long, dark hair into a ponytail and wore turquoise bolo ties and black hats with bands of silver. The women wore beaded necklaces and bracelets and red velvet skirts. And the children looked like miniature versions of their parents.

When we pulled into Hubbell's, I'd dash over to the Navajo pickup trucks and horse-drawn wagons. Sometimes I chased their herds of sheep, making loud bleating noises. They would run in all directions, and the trading post manager would throw his hands in the air and yell at me. He would have to start counting them all over again.

I thought it was funny, but Dad whopped me on the butt real hard. "Stop being a pain in the ass," he said. "The Navajos want to sell their sheep, buy some stuff, and get the hell out of here. They don't want to be bothered by your nonsense."

But I wanted to talk to them. I'd yell, "*Yá'át'ééh*," or "Hello" in Navajo. Sometimes I made whooping noises like the Indians in the movies when they raided wagon trains. The men turned their backs, and the children dropped their eyes to the ground and stuck their hands in their pockets. The mean, older women tried swatting me, but I was too fast for them. I wanted to have fun—no one else at Hubbell's did.

CHAPTER 3

During the school day, I had the compound to myself. None of the other young kids were allowed to roam free looking for trouble. One morning before Dad went to work, he saw me watching Shorty John through the living room window. “Look at that dumb Mexican shuffling. He barely lifts his feet off the ground.”

Shorty worked at EPNG as a maintenance man. Every day he carried a long hose from house to house to water the tiny patches of grass in the yards.

“He has no energy, David. No brains. I bet you could trick him easy, couldn’t you? Wouldn’t it be fun to sneak up on him and get him with the hose?” He laughed.

Dad and I started playing what-if games. What if I stopped Shorty from watering the grass? What if the son of a bitch chased me—could I outrun him to the house or get beyond the cattle guard and make him give up? What if I made his job so unbearable he quit? Dad kept shaking his head. “A snail could move faster and with more purpose.”

I sat on our front porch and studied Shorty and the hose. Then I’d creep up behind him and squeeze the hose into a V shape until the water stopped flowing. When he pointed the hose at his face to see what was wrong, I let go and watched it spurt into his eyes and nostrils. I giggled and ran away, always knowing the number of steps to my house so he couldn’t catch me.

Sometimes I'd run up to him, pull on his pants, and laugh when he stumbled after me. After that got boring, I would wait until he went down the street, and then I'd run over to his truck and fill his lunch pail with fire ants and lizards, an idea I came up with on my own, without Dad's help. I hid more ants inside his sandwich. When Shorty discovered what I had done, he chased me, but he was too slow to make the game much fun. He was easier to fool than Mom.

Each time I told Dad how I outran Shorty or what his face looked like when water squirted out of his nose, Dad laughed and asked me to tell him more. He shook his head and slapped me on the back. "You are the cleverest little shit I've ever known."

And when the poor man requested a transfer because I wouldn't stop, Dad treated me like a heavyweight boxing champion. He asked me to flex my muscles or run fast in front of his men, telling them that I could fool anybody and I would become a great fighter someday.

Whether he and I were at Hubbell's or in stores and gas stations outside Ganado, Dad told anyone who would listen how his four-year-old son defeated a full-grown man. He'd pull strangers aside. "Look at my boy," he would say. "Listen to what he did."

But the men in the compound weren't happy about what happened to Shorty. They said that the little guy had only been trying to do his job, that Dad had gone too far, egging me on the way he had. Dad just laughed.

What were they talking about? Messing with Shorty was hilarious.

AT THE DINNER TABLE, Dad told us stories about the Crow family. His big blue eyes teared up when he described how his Cherokee parents had struggled to survive the vicious white sons of bitches who abused them and how hard it had been to eke out a living in the Texas and Oklahoma dust bowls.

“My parents worked me like a rented mule, forcing me to pick cotton for twelve hours a day by the age of six,” he said, shaking his head. “And white people hated our red asses.”

His voice got quiet when he told us about his superior Cherokee intelligence and courage and how he could read at age four even though his dad never learned to read or write a single word of English. Dad went on to teach himself math, science, and physics and study the English classics by reading every book he could get his hands on, often by stealing them.

Taylor, his father, drew his name on the army application when he signed up to serve in World War I—being able to read wasn’t necessary to handle a machine gun or march all day and night. His ship narrowly missed being sunk by a German U-boat on the way to Europe. He survived the war, but his lungs were damaged by mustard gas in a German attack during a ferocious battle in France.

It wasn’t Taylor’s fault he was so mean, Dad said. The war had destroyed his mind and health, and he was never the same. Indians were treated horribly even when they defended their country against the German bastards.

After the war, thirty-three-year-old Taylor married fourteen-year-old Ella Mae, a cousin of his first wife, who had been killed in an automobile accident. Dad was the only one of Taylor and Ella Mae’s children to survive. Taylor spent the rest of his life in and out of Veterans Administration hospitals and roughnecking in the oil fields, which amounted to hauling heavy pieces of drilling equipment. When that work dried up, he picked cotton, bootlegged, and fought any dumbass who crossed his path—a trait he passed on to his son.

“My father sure as hell didn’t treat me right,” Dad said, stabbing the air with his fork. “He’d guzzle down moonshine and then storm into the house in a drunken rage and beat me with a wet rope.”