

## Ajo Apple Pie

In the 1950's, Jerry and his wife Linda vacationed in the southwest every year and on the vacation before his retirement, they paid down on a charming little casita in Ajo, Arizona. When they got back to Michigan, they put their house there up for sale. Shortly after signing the papers to sell the house, Linda found a bump and six months later, she died.

Now Jerry lives in the casita alone and spends his days exploring the surrounding mountains and desert in his Jeep. He sometimes drives uncertain roads on government land, he likes to get out beyond the tracks, where there are no more vehicle tracks, and then get out and hike to the top of the highest mountain. The mountains in this part of southern Arizona are seldom over 6,000 feet so the altitude is not a problem, but the ruggedness of the terrain is often a challenge.

When Linda passed away, Jerry was grieved to the heart, he felt die in him the song, their song. When he was with her, he was often reminded of something Plato said... "Every heart sings a song, incomplete, until another heart whispers back." Linda taught him when to Hold, when to Wait, and when to Let Go. Now that she is gone, he carries his life in his open hand.

While out percolating around, the Jeep seems to have caught the spirit of the driver, and they forge deeper and deeper into the desert heading south toward the border. In the deepening twilight, everything takes on a mysterious hue as he stops on a ridgeline and watches the complexion of everything change. The Jeep is stripped down, the doors and roof are off, the windshield is lying flat on the hood, he can see for miles in every direction. The air seems touched by an enchanter's wand as he looks at the brown leather seat beside him and sees an image of Linda sitting there, a boot on the dash, drinking from a canteen.

The vision of her with fine particles of light shining forth creating an aura of paradise reminds him of how the cleanest of floral scents wafted after her, and how the sound of her voice was a delicate song that conveyed its own secret message regardless of what she was saying.

He shakes his head and looks away toward the west where the sun has just slipped away leaving a sky so colorful it must be where the spectrum goes at night. He is reminded of John the Divine's vision being, "a sea of glass mingled with fire."

He drives a little further and comes to the remains of a broken-down barbed wire fence that marks the border with Mexico. He turns the Jeep around while thinking about how less than a hundred years ago this country was a slaughterhouse for the Apache. The mines around Ajo had to be abandoned by the Spanish because of Indian raids.

Back in town, he steers the Jeep under the remada beside the casita and goes in the back door to the kitchen. After washing off a couple pounds of dust in the shower, he sits at the kitchen table and eats Bush Beans from the can, a slice of bread, and a slice of white onion. Since Linda's passing, he has kept indifferent health, and has settled for not happiness, but something like peace. The desert issues a strange call to the wildness in him, and his attire has become picturesque, but not theatrical; he doesn't stand out in Ajo, a town full of copper miners and prospectors.

After his wife died, he shaved his long gray beard and got his long gray hair cut, then it became evident that he had purposefully looked older because his wife was much older than he. He had still not reached the age where books would provide his adventures, and the encompassing desert and mountains provided an exaltation at the prospect of exploring back roads to far places.

He doesn't go scouting about on weekends because that's when other people are out, and he prefers to have it all to himself on weekdays. Thus, on Saturday just after the sun goes down and it cools off a little, he goes out and does maintenance on the Jeep. His crafty hands are working under the hood when he hears someone walking his way. He looks out and sees his neighbor lady coming toward him carrying something.

She smiles, "Hi, Jerry, right?"

He smiles back, "Yes, and I've seen you at the supermarket and in your yard, but I'm afraid I don't remember your name."

She is a lady of mature but vigorous years, "It's Ellen. How you doing tonight? Is it hot enough for you?"

He looks up at an inky black sky, "Almost, just a few more degrees and I'll have to turn my A/C on."

She looks shocked, "You're kidding right?"

He laughs, "Yeah, it's on and running constantly."

She looks down at the round, glass dish in her hand that has a damp towel over it, then she blushes and says, "I made you an apple pie. Living here alone I don't think you get much home cooking so... anyway, here."

He takes the dish, "Thank you, you're right, since my wife passed away the only time I get a square meal is when I go out to eat." He laughs nervously.

She says, "I know what you mean. Since my husband passed away, it's just not as much fun to cook."

Jerry doesn't know what to say, "What did your husband do?"

"He retired from the railroad then we moved here; that was a few years ago. He was like you, a Desert Rat. I used to tell him that he would rather hear a coyote howl in the desert than listen to a choir in a cathedral."

Jerry laughs, "How 'bout you? Did you ever go out exploring in the desert with him?"

"No, I never did."

Maybe it is the subdued luminousness of the night or the dry keenness of the air, but for whatever reason without thinking about it, Jerry says, "Would you like to go out exploring with me sometime?"

She smiles and says, "No... but I'll fix dinner for you when you get back."

They smile, their eyes meet, and just then, the sky opens its starry eyes.

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