

Cowboys and Indians

Part II

There are lonely hours. How can I deny it? There are times when *solitaire* becomes solitary, an entirely different game, a prison term, and the inside of the skull as confining and unbearable as the interior of the housetrailer on a hot day.

To escape both, I live more and more in the out-of-doors. First I built the fireplace on a level bench of sandstone about fifty yards to the rear of the trailer. I dragged the wooden picnic table close to the fireplace and this became my office and dining room. Next I built a *ramada* or sunshelter over both. The *ramada* is a simple affair: four upright posts about ten feet tall tied and braced with crosspoles and supporting a thatched roof of juniper branches, which keeps out the sunlight but lets smoke and heat filter up through. There are of course no walls to this structure. The floor is sandstone, swept clean by the winds, with a couple of wild shrubs—cliffrose and blackbush—growing in one corner. The windbells and the red bandana, my private flag, hang from the projecting end of one of the crosspoles. Finally I set up a cot near the *ramada*—not under it—and my home without walls was complete. I can sleep at night with nothing but space between me and the stars, comforted in the knowledge that I am not likely to miss anything important up there.

The housetrailer serves now chiefly as storage place and kitchen. Although I sometimes cook at the fireplace outside, it is certainly easier to use the gas stove in the trailer, despite the heat. When the meal is

ready I carry it out to the picnic table under the *ramada* and eat it there. The refrigerator, too, is a useful machine. Not indispensable but useful. It is in fact one of the few positive contributions of scientific technology to civilization and I am grateful for it. Raised in the backwoods of the Allegheny Mountains, I remember clearly how we used to chop blocks of ice out of Crooked Creek, haul them with team and wagon about a mile up the hill to the farmhouse and store them away in sawdust for use in the summer. Every time I drop a couple of ice cubes into a tumbler I think with favor of all the iron and coal miners, bargemen, railroaders, steelworkers, technicians, designers, factory assemblers, wholesalers, truckdrivers and retailers who have combined their labors (often quite taxing) to provide me with this simple but pleasant convenience, without which the highball or the *Cuba libre* would be poor things indeed.

Once the drink is mixed, however, I always go *outside*, out in the light and the air and the space and the breeze, to enjoy it. Making the best of both worlds, that's the thing.

But how, you might ask, does living outdoors on the terrace enable me to escape that other form of isolation, the solitary confinement of the mind? For there are the bad moments, or were, especially at the beginning of my life here, when I would sit down at the table for supper inside the housetrailer and discover with a sudden shock that I was alone. There was nobody, nobody at all, on the other side of the table. Alone-ness became loneliness and the sensation was strong enough to remind me (how could I have forgotten?) that the one thing better than solitude, the only thing better than solitude, is society.

By society I do not mean the roar of city streets or the cultured and cultural talk of the schoolmen (reach for your revolver!) or human life in general. I mean the society of a friend or friends or a good friendly good-looking woman.

Strange as it might seem, I found that eating my supper in the open made a difference. Inside the trailer, surrounded by the artifice of America, I was reminded insistently of all that I had, for a season, left behind; the plywood walls and the dusty venetian blinds and the light bulbs and the smell of butane made me think of Albuquerque. But taking my meal outside by the burning juniper in the fireplace with more desert and mountains than I could explore in a lifetime open to view, I was invited to contemplate a far larger world, one which extends into a past and into a future without any limits known to the human kind. By taking off my shoes and digging my toes in the sand I made contact with that larger world—an exhilarating feeling which leads to equanimity. Certainly I was still by myself, so to speak—there were no other people around and there still are none—but in the midst of such a grand tableau it was impossible to give full and serious con-

sideration to Albuquerque. All that is human melted with the sky and faded out beyond the mountains and I felt, as I feel—is it a paradox?—that a man can never find or need better companionship than that of himself.

As for the “solitary confinement of the mind,” my theory is that solipsism, like other absurdities of the professional philosopher, is a product of too much time wasted in library stacks between the covers of a book, in smoke-filled coffeehouses (bad for the brains) and conversation-clogged seminars. To refute the solipsist or the metaphysical idealist all that you have to do is take him out and throw a rock at his head: if he ducks he’s a liar. His logic may be airtight but his argument, far from revealing the delusions of living experience, only exposes the suffocation of logic.

In the evenings after work I sit at the table outside and watch the sky condensing in the form of twilight over the desert. I am alone but loneliness has passed like a shadow, has come and is gone. I hear the mutter of the flames in the fireplace, eating wood. Far away to the south I can see the headlights of a car or truck approaching Moab. It is so far away, that merged point of light, that unless you watch it steadily you will not perceive that it is in motion; relative to the distance the light moves as the stars move or about as fast as the sun fades from the sky or the fire consumes the log.

I am not alone. From the vicinity of Balanced Rock comes the cry of the great horned owl. Supper time, for the owl. The mice, squirrels, gophers, rabbits know what I mean. What is he up to? Rather than hunt for his supper the owl seems to be calling his supper to come to him. He calls again and again, always from the same place, not moving, in a voice which seems to come from not one spot alone but—anywhere. A war of nerves.

His nervous, timorous prey, terribly insecure, hear that cry and tremble. Where exactly is the owl? Perhaps the next shrub, the next rock, would offer better concealment than this. They hesitate. The great horned owl cries again and a rabbit breaks, dashes for what might be a better place, revealing his position. Quiet as a moth the owl swoops down.

The horned owl may be the natural enemy of the rabbit but surely the rabbit is the natural friend of the horned owl. The rabbit feeds the owl. One can imagine easily the fondness, the sympathy, the genuine affection with which the owl regards the rabbit before rending it into edible portions.

Is the affection reciprocated? In that moment of truce, of utter surrender, when the rabbit still alive offers no resistance but only waits,

is it possible that the rabbit also loves the owl? We know that the condemned man, at the end, does not resist but submits passively, almost gratefully, to the instruments of his executioner. We have seen millions march without a whimper of protest into an inferno. Is it love? Or only teamwork again—good sportsmanship?

Fear betrays the rabbit to the great horned owl. Fear does the hard work, making the owl’s job easy. After a lifetime of dread it is more than likely that the rabbit yields to the owl during that last moment with a sense of gratitude, as pleased to be eaten—finally!—as the owl is to eat. For the one a consummation, for the other fulfillment. How can we speak of natural enemies in such a well organized system of operations and procedures? All the time, everywhere, something or someone is dying to please.

The great horned owl calls again, once or twice every few minutes, concerned but not anxious. Supper will come. A few bats flicker through the air near the ramada making tiny clicking noises—sonar. There is no moon tonight. Stars appear one by one, forming incomplete constellations: Scorpio, Cassiopeia, Draco, Sagittarius and the Big Dipper. Like a solitary diamond Venus glows on the soft flare in the west, following the sun.

*Thou fair-haired angel of the evening,
Now, whilst the sun rests on the mountains, light
Thy bright torch of love; thy radiant crown
Put on, and smile upon our evening bed.
Smile on our loves. . . .*

In the mixture of starlight and cloud-reflected sunlight in which the desert world is now illuminated, each single object stands forth in preternatural though transient brilliance, a final assertion of existence before the coming of night: each rock and shrub and tree, each flower, each stem of grass, diverse and separate, vividly isolate, yet joined each to every other in a unity which generously includes me and my solitude as well.

Or so it seems at the moment, as my fire dies to a twist of smoke and a heap of rubies, and for a moment I think I’ve almost caught a falling star: there is no mystery; there is only paradox, the incontrovertible union of contradictory truths. A falling star which melts into vapor as I grasp it, which flows through my fingers like water, like smoke.

What about the Indians? There are no Indians in the Arches country now; they all left seven hundred years ago and won’t be back for a long time. But here as elsewhere in the canyonlands they left a record of

their passage. Near springs and under overhanging cliffs, good camping spots, you may find chipping grounds scattered with hundreds of fragments of flint or chert where the Anasazi hunters worked their arrowpoints. You may find shards of pottery. At other places you will see their writing on the canyon walls—the petroglyphs and pictographs.

Petroglyphs are pecked into the rock; pictographs are painted on the rock. Whether in one form or the other they consist of representations of birds, snakes, deer and many other animals, of human, semihuman and superhuman figures, and of designs purely abstract or symbolic. In some places you find only petroglyphs, in other places only pictographs, in some places both. The explicitly representational often comes side by side with the highly abstract.

In style the inscriptions and paintings range from the crude and simple to the elegant, sophisticated and subtle. They seem to include the work of different cultures and a great extent of time: on a wall of rock near Turnbow Cabin is pictured a man on horseback, which must have been made after the arrival of the Spanish in Southwest America; on another rock wall a few miles southwest of Moab is the petroglyph of what appears to be a mastodon—a beast supposedly extinct more than twenty thousand years ago.

Whether crude or elegant, representational or abstract, very old or relatively new, all of the work was done in a manner pleasing to contemporary taste, with its vogue for the stylized and primitive. The ancient canyon art of Utah belongs in that same international museum without walls which makes African sculpture, Melanesian masks, and the junkyards of New Jersey equally interesting—those voices of silence which speak to us in the first world language. As for the technical competence of the artists, its measure is apparent in the fact that these pictographs and petroglyphs though exposed to the attack of wind, sand, rain, heat, cold and sunlight for centuries still survive vivid and clear. How much of the painting and sculpture being done in America today will last—in the merely physical sense—for even a half century?

The pictures (to substitute one term for the petroglyph-pictograph combination) are found on flat surfaces along the canyon walls, often at heights now inaccessible to a man on foot. (Because of erosion.) They usually appear in crowded clusters, with figures of a later date sometimes superimposed on those of an earlier time. There is no indication that the men who carved and painted the figures made any attempt to compose them into coherent murals; the endless variety of style, subject and scale suggests the work of many individuals from different times and places who for one reason or another came by, stopped, camped for days or weeks and left a sign of their passing on the rock.

What particular meaning, if any, have these pictures on the canyon

walls? No one has a definite answer to that question but several possible explanations come to mind when you see them, in their strange and isolated settings, for the first time.

They could be the merest doodling—that is an easy first impression. Yet there's quite a difference between scribbling on paper and on sandstone. As anyone knows who has tried to carve his name in rock, the task requires persistence, patience, determination and skill. Imagine the effort required to inscribe, say, the figure of a dancer, with no tool but a flint chisel and in such a way as to make it last five hundred years.

Perhaps these stone walls served as community bulletin boards, a form of historical record-keeping, a "newspaper rock" whereon individuals carved and painted their clan or totemic signatures. Or the frequently repeated figures of deer, beaver, bighorn sheep and other animals might represent the story of successful hunting parties.

While many of the pictures may have had for their makers a religious or ceremonial significance, others look like apparitions out of bad dreams. In this category belong the semihuman and superhuman beings with horned heads, immensely broad shoulders, short limbs and massive bodies that taper down to attenuated legs. Some of them have no legs at all but seem to rise ghostlike out of nothing, floating on air. These are sinister and supernatural figures, gods from the underworld perhaps, who hover in space, or dance, or stand solidly planted on two feet carrying weapons—a club or sword. Most are faceless but some stare back at you with large, hollow, disquieting eyes. Demonic shapes, they might have meant protection and benevolence to their creators and a threat to strangers:

Beware, traveler. You are approaching the land of the horned gods. . . .

Whatever their original intention, the long-dead artists and hunters confront us across the centuries with the poignant sign of their humanity. I was here, says the artist. We were here, say the hunters.

One other thing is certain. The pre-Columbian Indians of the Southwest, whether hunting, making arrowpoints, going on salt-gathering expeditions or otherwise engaged, clearly enjoyed plenty of leisure time. This speaks well of the food-gathering economy and also of its culture, which encouraged the Indians to employ their freedom in the creation and sharing of a durable art. Unburdened by the necessity of devoting most of their lives to the production, distribution, sale and servicing of labor-saving machinery, lacking proper recreational facilities, these primitive savages were free to do that which comes as naturally to men as making love—making graven images.

But now they are gone, some six or seven hundred years later, though not as a race extinguished: their descendants survive in the Hopi,

Zuni and other Pueblo tribes of Arizona and New Mexico. What drove the ancient ones out of the canyonlands? Marauding enemies? Drought and starvation? Disease? The fear born of nightmares, the nightmares that rise from fear? A combination of these and other causes? The old people have left no record of disaster on the mural walls of the canyons; we can do no more than make educated guesses based on what is known about climatic changes, tribal warfare and Indian village life in the Southwest. Their departure from the high plateau country may have been gradual, an emigration spread out over many years, or it may in some places have been a sudden, panicky flight. In almost all of the cliff dwellings valuable property was abandoned—arrowheads, pottery, seed corn, sandals, turquoise and coral jewelry—which suggests that something happened which impelled the inhabitants to leave in a great hurry. But other explanations are possible. Personal property would have been buried with the dead, to be later dug up by pillagers and animals or exposed by erosion. Or the departing Indians, having no domesticated animals except dogs, may simply have been unable to carry away all of their possessions. Or the abandoned articles may have been under a curse, associated with disease and death.

Today, outside the canyon country and particularly in Arizona and New Mexico, the Indians are making a great numerical comeback, outbreeding the white man by a ratio of three to two. The population of the Navajo tribe, to take the most startling example, has increased from approximately 9,500 in 1865 to about 90,000 a century later—a multiplication almost tenfold in only three generations. The increase is the direct result of the white man's medical science as introduced on the Navajo reservation, which greatly reduced the infant mortality rate and thereby made possible such formidable fecundity. This happened despite the fact that infant mortality rates among the Indians are still much higher than among the American population as a whole. Are the Navajos grateful? They are not. To be poor is bad enough; to be poor and multiplying is worse.

In the case of the Navajo the effects of uncontrolled population growth are vividly apparent. The population, though ten times greater than a century ago, must still exist on a reservation no bigger now than it was then. In a pastoral economy based on sheep, goats and horses the inevitable result, as any child could have foreseen, was severe overgrazing and the transformation of the range—poor enough to start with—from a semiarid grassland to an eroded waste of blowsand and nettles. In other words the land available to the Navajos not only failed to expand in proportion to their growing numbers; it has actually diminished in productive capacity.

In order to survive, more and more of the Navajos, or The People as they used to call themselves, are forced off the reservation and into rural slums along the major highways and into the urban slums of the white man's towns which surround the reservation. Here we find them today doing the best they can as laborers, gas station attendants, motel maids and dependents of the public welfare system. They are the Negroes of the Southwest—red black men. Like their cousins in the big cities they turn for solace, quite naturally, to alcohol and drugs; the peyote cult in particular grows in popularity under the name of The Native American Church.

Unequipped to hold their own in the ferociously competitive world of White America, in which even the language is foreign to them, the Navajos sink ever deeper into the culture of poverty, exhibiting all of the usual and well-known symptoms: squalor, unemployment or irregular and ill-paid employment, broken families, disease, prostitution, crime, alcoholism, lack of education, too many children, apathy and demoralization, and various forms of mental illness, including evangelical Protestantism. Whether in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, the *barrios* of Caracas, the ghettos of Newark, the mining towns of West Virginia or the tarpaper villages of Gallup, Flagstaff and Shiprock, it's the same the world over—one big wretched family sequestered in sullen desperation, pawed over by social workers, kicked around by the cops and prayed over by the missionaries.

There are interesting differences, of course, both in kind and degree between the plight of the Navajo Indians and that of their brothers-in-poverty around the world. For one thing the Navajos have the B.I.A. looking after them—the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The B.I.A. like everything else is a mixture of good and bad, with policies that change and budgets that fluctuate with every power shift in Washington, but its general aim over the long run has been to change Indians into white men, a process called "assimilation." In pursuit of this end the little Indians are herded into schools on and off the reservation where, under the tutelage of teachers recruited by the B.I.A. from Negro colleges deep in the Bible Belt, the Navajo children learn to speak American with a Southern accent. The B.I.A., together with medical missions set up by various churches, also supplies the Navajos with basic medical services, inadequate by national standards but sufficient nevertheless to encourage the extravagant population growth which is the chief cause, though not the only cause, of the Navajos' troubles.

A second important difference in the situation of the Navajo Indians from that of others sunk in poverty is that the Navajos still have a home of their own—the reservation, collective property of the tribe as a whole. The land is worn out, barren, eroded, hopelessly unsuited to support a

heavy human population but even so, however poor in economic terms, it provides the Navajo people with a firm base on earth, the possibility of a better future and for the individual Navajo in exile a place where, when he has to go back there, they have to take him in. Where they would not think of doing otherwise.

Poor as the land is it still attracts the avarice of certain whites in neighboring areas who can see in it the opportunity for profit if only the present occupants are removed. Since the land belongs to the tribe no individual within the tribe is legally empowered to sell any portion of it. Periodic attempts are made, therefore, by false friends of the Navajos, to have the reservation broken up under the guise of granting the Indians "property rights" so that they will be "free" to sell their only tangible possession—the land—to outsiders. So far the tribe has been wise enough to resist this pressure and so long as it continues to do so The People will never be completely separated from their homeland.

Retaining ownership of their land, the Navajos have been able to take maximum advantage through their fairly coherent and democratic tribal organization of the modest mineral resources which have been found within the reservation. The royalties from the sale of oil, uranium, coal and natural gas, while hardly enough to relieve the Indians' general poverty, have enabled them to develop a tribal timber business, to provide a few college scholarships for the brainiest (not necessarily the best) of their young people, to build community centers and finance an annual tribal fair (a source of much enjoyment to The People), and to drill a useful number of water wells for the benefit of the old sheep and goat-raising families still hanging on in the backlands.

The money is also used to support the small middle class of officials and functionaries which tribal organization has created, and to pay the costs of a tribal police force complete with uniforms, guns, patrol cars and two-way radios. These unnecessary evils reflect the influence of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the desire on the part of the more ambitious Navajos to imitate as closely as they can the pattern of the white man's culture which surrounds them, a typical and understandable reaction. Despite such minor failures the Navajos as a tribe have made good use of what little monetary income they have. It is not entirely their fault if the need remains far greater than tribal resources can satisfy.

Meanwhile the tribal population continues to grow in geometric progression: 2 . . . 4 . . . 8 . . . 16 . . . 32 . . . 64, etc., onward and upward, as the majority of The People settle more deeply into the second-class way of life, American style, to which they are fairly accustomed, with all of its advantages and disadvantages: the visiting caseworker from the welfare department, the relief check, the derelict automobiles upside down on the front yard, the tarpaper shack next to the hogan and

ramada, the repossessed TV set, the confused adolescents, and the wine bottles in the kitchen midden.

Various solutions are proposed: industrialization; tourism; massive federal aid; better education for the Navajo children; relocation; birth control; child subsidies; guaranteed annual income; four-lane highways; moral rearmament. None of these proposals are entirely devoid of merit and at least one of them—birth control—is obviously essential though not in itself sufficient if poverty is to be alleviated among the Navajo Indians. As for the remainder, they are simply the usual banal, unimaginative if well-intentioned proposals made everywhere, over and over again, in reply to the demand for a solution to the national and international miseries of mankind. As such they fail to take into account what is unique and valuable in the Navajo's traditional way of life and ignore altogether the possibility that the Navajo may have as much to teach the white man as the white man has to teach the Navajo.

Industrialization, for example. Even if the reservation could attract and sustain large-scale industry heavy or light, which it cannot, what have the Navajos to gain by becoming factory hands, lab technicians and office clerks? The Navajos are *people*, not *personnel*; nothing in their nature or tradition has prepared them to adapt to the regimentation of application forms and time clock. To force them into the machine would require a Procrustean mutilation of their basic humanity. Consciously or unconsciously the typical Navajo senses this unfortunate truth, resists the compulsory miseducation offered by the Bureau, hangs on to his malnourished horses and cannibalized automobiles, works when he feels like it and quits when he has enough money for a party or the down payment on a new pickup. He fulfills other obligations by getting his wife and kids installed securely on the public welfare rolls. Are we to condemn him for this? Caught in a no-man's land between two worlds the Navajo takes what advantage he can of the white man's system—the radio, the pickup truck, the welfare—while clinging to the liberty and dignity of his old way of life. Such a man would rather lie drunk in the gutters of Gallup, New Mexico, a disgrace to his tribe and his race, than button on a clean white shirt and spend the best part of his life inside an air-conditioned office building with windows that cannot be opened.

Even if he wanted to join the American middle class (and some Indians do wish to join and have done so) the average Navajo suffers from a handicap more severe than skin color, the language barrier or insufficient education: his acquisitive instinct is poorly developed. He lacks the drive to get ahead of his fellows or to figure out ways and means of profiting from other people's labor. Coming from a tradition which honors sharing and mutual aid above private interest, the Navajo

thinks it somehow immoral for one man to prosper while his neighbors go without. If a member of the tribe does break from this pattern, through luck, talent or special training, and finds a niche in the affluent society, he can also expect to find his family and clansmen camping on his patio, hunting in his kitchen, borrowing his car and occupying his bedrooms at any hour of the day or night. Among these people a liberal hospitality is taken for granted and selfishness regarded with horror. Shackled by such primitive attitudes, is it any wonder that the Navajos have not yet been able to get in step with the rest of us?

If industrialism per se seems an unlikely answer to the problems of the Navajo (and most of the other tribes) there still remains industrial tourism to be considered. This looks a little more promising, and with the construction of new highways, motels and gas stations the tribe has taken steps to lure tourists into the reservation and relieve them of their dollars. The chief beneficiaries will be the oil and automotive combines far away, but part of the take will remain on the reservation in the form of wages paid to those who change the sheets, do the laundry, pump the gas, serve the meals, wash the dishes, clean the washrooms and pump out the septic tanks—simple tasks for which the Navajos are available and qualified.

How much the tourist industry can add to the tribal economy, how many Indians it may eventually employ, are questions not answerable at this time. At best it provides only seasonal work and this on a marginal scale—ask any chambermaid. And whether good or bad in strictly pecuniary terms, industrial tourism exacts a spiritual price from those dependent upon it for their livelihood. The natives must learn to accustom themselves to the spectacle of hordes of wealthy, outlandishly dressed strangers invading their land and their homes. They must learn the automatic smile. They must expect to be gaped at and photographed. They must learn to be quaint, picturesque and photogenic. They must learn that courtesy and hospitality are not simply the customs of any decent society but are rather a special kind of commodity which can be peddled for money.

I am not sure that the Navajos can learn these things. For example, the last time I was in Kayenta I witnessed the following incident:

One of the old men, one of the old Longhairs with a Mongolian mustache and tall black hat, is standing in the dust and sunlight in front of the Holiday Inn, talking with two of his wives. A big car rolls up—a Buick Behemoth I believe it was, or it may have been a Cadillac Crocodile, a Dodge Dinosaur or a Mercury Mastodon, I'm not sure which—and this *lady* climbs out of it. She's wearing golden stretch pants, green eyelids and a hiveshaped head of hair that looks both in color and texture exactly like 25¢ worth of cotton candy. She has a camera

in her hands and is aiming it straight at the old Navajo. "Hey!" she says. "Look this way." He looks, sees the woman, spits softly on the ground and turns his back. Naturally offended, the lady departs without buying even a postcard.

But he was an old one. The young are more adaptable and under the pressure to survive may learn to turn tricks for the tourist trade. That, and a few coal mines here and there, and jobs away from the reservation, and more welfare, will enable the Navajos to carry on through the near future. In the long run their economic difficulties can only be solved when and if our society as a whole is willing to make an honest effort to eliminate poverty. By honest effort, as opposed to the current dishonest effort with its emphasis on phoney social services which benefit no one but the professional social workers, I mean a direct confrontation with the two actual basic causes of poverty: (1) too many children and—(here I reveal the secret, the elusive and mysterious key to the whole problem)—(2) too little money. Though simple in formula, the solution will seem drastic and painful in practice. To solve the first part of the problem we may soon have to make birth control compulsory; to solve the second part we will have to borrow from Navajo tradition and begin a more equitable sharing of national income. Politically unpalatable? No doubt. Social justice in this country means social surgery—carving some of the fat off the wide bottom of the American rich.

Navajo poverty can be cured and in one way or the other—through justice or war—it will be cured. It is doubtful, however, that the Navajo way of life, as distinguished from Navajos, can survive. Outnumbered, surrounded and overwhelmed, the Navajos will probably be forced in self-defense to malform themselves into the shape required by industrial econometrics. Red-skinned black men at present, they must learn to become dark-brown white men with credit cards and crew-cut sensibilities.

It will not be easy. It will not be easy for the Navajos to forget that once upon a time, only a generation ago, they were horsemen, nomads, keepers of flocks, painters in sand, weavers of wool, artists in silver, dancers, singers of the Yei-bei-chei. But they will have to forget, or at least learn to be ashamed of these old things and to bring them out only for the amusement of tourists.

A difficult transitional period. Tough on people. For instance, consider an unfortunate accident which took place only a week ago here in the Arches country. Parallel to the highway north of Moab is a railway, a spur line to the potash mines. At one point close to the road this railway cuts through a hill. The cut is about three hundred feet deep, blasted through solid rock with sides that are as perpendicular as the walls of a building. One afternoon two young Indians—Navajos?

Apaches? beardless Utes?—in an old perverted Plymouth came hurtling down the highway, veered suddenly to the right, whizzed through a fence and plunged straight down like helldivers into the Big Cut. Investigating the wreckage we found only the broken bodies, the broken bottles, the stain and smell of Tokay, and a couple of cardboard suitcases exploded open to reveal their former owners' worldly goods—dirty socks, some underwear, a copy of *True West* magazine, a comb, three new cowboy shirts from J.C. Penney's, a carton of Marlboro cigarettes. But nowhere did we see any eagle feathers, any conchos of silver, any buffalo robes, any bows, arrows, medicine pouch or drums.

Some Indians.

Well . . . the cowboys have their troubles too. Viviano, old Roy Scobie, they're finished. Cowboyism rides rampant as never before on a field of golden neon dollar signs but job openings for working cowboys are scarce. The cattlegrowing industry like almost everything else has been mechanized and automated. There was a time and not so very long ago when ranching was a way of life, and a good one. Now it is simply a component of the lab to market food-processing apparatus: you take a steer, drop a hormone tablet in his ear and step back quickly. The steer bloats up suddenly like a poisoned pup and you've got two hundred dollars worth of marbled beef on the hoof, waiting for the meat hook.

Most of the cowboys I know are out of work or about to lose their jobs or doing something else. My friend Ralph Newcomb studies Sri Aurobindo and Bill Eastlake has sunk to writing novels. Others play the electric guitar, drive trucks, or break their bones with an unpleasant crunching sound on the rodeo circuit. Many are committing slow suicide on skid row (like the Indians) or at best (as Viviano used to do) working overtime in hopes of collecting back pay.

While the actual working cowboy disappears, along with the genuine nonworking Indian, the make-believe cowboys flourish and multiply like flies on a pecan pie. Everywhere you see them now, from California to Florida, from Texas to Times Square, crowding the streets in their big white hats, tight pants, flowered shirts, and high-heeled fruity boots. From the rear many of them look like women; many of them *are* women. Especially in the small towns west of the Mississippi, where cowboyism as a cult grows in direct ratio to the disappearance of cattle herding as an occupation, you will see the latest, the Mr. and Mrs. Cattleman couple in authentic matching Western costume—the husband with sunburnt nose and belly bulging over a steerhorn buckle heavy enough to kill a horse with, and his wife, a tall tough broad in

gabardines and boots with a look on her face that would make a Comanche blanch.

But it wasn't always a fake. I think of Viviano, of old Roy, and of another I knew for a while, Leslie McKee, who was both cowboy and cattleman, since he ran a one-man outfit. His career followed an irregular course; every other year the bank took his little ranch away from him and every other year Leslie managed to get it back. Between ranches he worked at whatever he could find. In his youth—long before asphalt—he had driven the first motor stage between Monticello and Moab, a unique bus line which, according to Les, carried three classes of passengers: first class rode, second class walked, third class pushed. He rode as an extra in the movies and got hit in the eye with one of Geronimo's rubber-tipped arrows. One day on Grand Mesa he came on a bear and roped it, planning to lead it home; he changed his mind when the bear took the rope in both paws and walked toward Les and his horse, coiling up the rope as it came. He'd made a little money in the rodeo game and offered me this advice on riding the broomtails:

"Always give a bronc a fair shake. Don't pull its head up and don't grab leather. Better yet don't get on."

Like most other cowboys I have known Leslie was getting on in years. Also, he suffered from sciatica and shingles and like me was allergic to tumbleweed. Leslie too went the way of the others, leaving no sons.

Cowboys and Indians disappear, dying off or transforming themselves by tortuous degrees into something quite different. The originals are nearly gone and will soon be lost forever in the overwhelming crowd. Legendary enemies, their ghosts ride away together—buddies at last—into the mythic sunset of the West.

*Weep, all you little rains,
wail, winds, wail—
all along, along, along
the Colorado Trail. . . .*

Twilight is over, night is here, the sky is rich with frosty, burning, glittering stars. I become aware that the great horned owl near Balanced Rock has stopped calling; presumably he has found a satisfactory dinner. Bon appétit, mon frère.

My little fire is now completely dead, too cold to rekindle, and I must decide whether to rebuild it or unroll the sleeping bag on the cot and turn in. Not an easy decision. The air is still and cool and I am glad that the heat of the day is finally gone. Tomorrow—or is it the day after?—will be the first of July. I have come to the midpoint of my season in the desert.