

Encounter in Globe, Arizona

Dave Thorpe

It was 4:45 PM when Todd heard the two loud knocks on his front door. He muttered a quiet, "What the...?" and strained forward out of the Lazy-Boy. His two German Shorthair pointers sprung to all fours, taut with energy and ready to barge headlong into the intruder. Against their inbred desire to investigate, they were shooed into the back yard, their barks becoming muffled when the dual-pane glass door closed behind them.

He was a stranger. In Globe, Arizona, a man is sized up by girth of his biceps and the fire in his eye. A sideways glance through the front window revealed that this one posed no threat. Todd opened the door and shot a look directly into the man's eyes. It wasn't a hostile look, and it wasn't a welcoming one either. Without a sound, the message was as clear and matter-of-fact as the computerized greeting of a speaker-box at a loading dock: "What is your business here?"

He was in his late sixties, with sun-darkened skin. Deep lines and hollow cheeks bespoke a life-time smoking habit. He stood in unfamiliar territory, but his unbent posture projected a bravado that Todd imagined had been learned the hard way in the local taverns. "I hear you buy old mine lights," the man said. The lethargy and reluctance Todd felt, instantly disappeared - yet he tried not to reveal his new enthusiasm. Their encounter had very suddenly become a poker match of bluff and strategy. Each man had something that the other one wanted, and at this point, neither had an inkling as to the game's outcome.

"It all depends on what you have, I guess," Todd said, and then beckoned him inside. The man paused briefly when he crossed the threshold, looking left, and then right, before he continued further. He was taking in the details of the domicile in order to estimate the depth of the pockets he was dealing with. His pride would never let on that the highest creature comfort he was accustomed to was an aging single-wide in Claypool. He noted that the house had central air and a Kenmore refrigerator, items that he considered unnecessary show. He placed a box on the kitchen table, one he had prepared just minutes earlier to emphasize that his offering was no junkyard relic. The container was cardboard with an Adidas logo and a Walmart sku tag.



He opened the lid slowly and lifted out the artifact. It was wrapped in pages of the Penny-Saver. The man's hands had a coarse tremor, partly nervous, and partly physical. His knuckles were enlarged and his fingers were permanently stiffened in a semi-flexed state. He undid the layers of newspaper as if removing the velvet wraps of the Hope Diamond. "Is that what your're looking for?"

It was a miner's candleholder, and on first glance, appeared to be a Lindahl brand with a tubular brass handle. But this model was different: it had no maker's mark, and was a hand-made one-of-a-kind. The steel shank and thimble were oxidized deep black from nearly a century's aging. Todd handled the stick, he undid the screw cap on the handle and peered inside as if this act was part of a time-honored inspection procedure. Nodding with a sign of approval, he replied, "What do you want for it?"



It took all the acting the old man could muster to maintain a deadpan look and declare, "I got to have two hundred for it." Well-practiced in the art of rural negotiation, Todd stroked his chin, and mentally counted out twelve seconds before reflexively coming back with a counter offer of \$170. "One ninety two is as low as I can go," the old man said, "I got nearly that much into it." Chico Gonzales of Superior had in fact given him the stick a week ago in gratitude for being allowed to mow the weeds around the trailer for minimum wage. To what degree it had been ill-gotten by Chico, was none of the man's concern.

Todd retrieved a cigar box from the pantry. The same box had been in continuous use for twenty-five years as the household petty cash drawer. He counted out loud the full amount and handed it to the man, who folded the wad in two and placed it in a chrome money clip. He wanted to light a Pall Mall. Todd let the dogs in to help escort the old man out of the house. While one raked his shirt, the other used his head to batter the lower body. The man could barely hang onto his Bic lighter as he backed out the front door, one arm extended to block further contact. Done deal.