

**The Cattercorns of
Cloudville Arizona**

Richard W. Kelly

The Cattercorns of Cloudville Arizona

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The Cattercorns of Cloudville Arizona Sample

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THANK YOU

Madison K. Kelly for helping me come up with such a ridiculous premise.

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***Excerpt from Trust Us Inc. Standard
Operating Procedures***

Basics of demeanor while on the phones

The three rules of demeanor are

1. Always remember your character - If you are playing the role of an IT support agent, then you need to focus on the technical and avoid getting personal
2. Read the mood of the mark - It is rare that a mark will quickly and willingly fall for the scam you are trying to perform. If they feel like they are too on board, present more issues to them. For example if you are speaking with a woman and impersonating her grandchild tell her that you are in too much trouble and things can't happen fast enough to keep you out of jail. Changing the subject to the negative throws the mark off and gets them into a sympathy modality.
3. Always consider how much there is to acquire. If you are asking for fifteen grand and there is a lack of resistance there is likely a lot more money to go

around. Find loop holes and small additions that will help get that total dollar amount higher.

PART I

Kermit sat on his living room floor counting the change he had pulled from under the couch. The lack of money made him want to cry. Three quarters, one dime, and two pennies was not quite enough to buy a taco. He took a deep breath as he looked to his water stained ceiling. With a loud exhale, he realized it was going to be another few days of Ramen noodles. Not that his physique couldn't handle a few days of limited calories. Kermit was a bit of a plumper.

Scott plainly ignored his broke roommate and continued to watch Wheel of Fortune desperately attempting to see through Kermit's head rather than acknowledge the blatant cry for attention. He squinted his eyes as if that would change the translucence of his friend's dark hair. He could see 'wal... head... the dog... head... ong... head... h'.

WAL_____THE
DOG_____ONG
_____H

Scott bounced in his seat as he proudly stated, “Walking the dog but have the wrong bitch!”

The stupid guess pulled Kermit out of his self-wallowing stupor to turn and look at the television. A quick shake of his head flinging his overgrown hair from side to side brought him back to reality. He grabbed his change as he stood up to get out of the way of the screen. “I think it is ‘walking the dog on a long leash’.”

Scott was used to getting the puzzles wrong, he was terrible at any television game show. However, that puzzle should have been obvious. “Well if your big head wasn’t in the way.”

Kermit ignored the odd statement and instead tried to bum a ride off his financially advantaged roommate. “Any chance you are going to the grocery store any time soon?” His glasses slid down his nose just a bit giving off the feeling that even the inanimate objects around him were sulking for him.

“Don’t have enough for gas?” Scott continued to watch Wheel, missing out on the pouty posture of his twenty two year old roommate and best friend. With only T’s and A’s on the board.

--- -A-- A--
--AT----T ----

“Big cans and flatulent buns?”

“No. I don’t have enough to eat really. I need a ride so I can stock up on Ramen and maybe live until I get paid on Friday.” There were many times that Kermit hated his best friend, but the times when he was down on money were probably the worst. Scott had it all together, at least for an early twenty something with a high school education. He was muscular, popular with the ladies, funny, financially stable... Not to say he did not have his issues. He had a bit of an overbite, buckteeth, and general goofy demeanor.

They had guessed n, r, and e.

RE- -A-E AN-
-RAT--R-T ----

“Ref babe and bratwurst logs?” Scott shook his at his wrong answer letting his short naturally red locks bounce above his visage.

“Any chance you headed that way?” He really hated it when Scott made him spell everything out. Couldn’t he understand the shame in being broke and relying on people around you?

“I guess I can run up there in a bit, how about after Wheel?” He was lost in his game, now with o, d, and s.

RED -A-E AND
-RAT--RST SO--

He barely realized what he was agreeing to, “Red male and bratwurst sock?”

“Thanks, I really need the help today.” Kermit looked back at the screen and reached out to pat Scott on the shoulder. “It’s red kale and bratwurst soup.”

Scott gritted his lips and nodded as he realized Kermit had solved the puzzle.

Kermit waited patiently as his friend and roommate watched his television program. It seemed in times like this he would find himself thinking about his life and how he ended up where he is. Just four years before he felt like he had the world at his feet, having graduated from high school and already making money working in the telephone scam industry.

His parents had begged and pleaded with him to go to school, but he didn’t understand the point. He was making ten thousand dollars on a bad month. Every time he convinced an old lady that he was a Nigerian prince, he brought in five grand. Every time he suckered a business executive into giving him access to his computer, he would make eight thousand. He was good at them all, auto warranty scams, charity scams, disaster relief scams, grandparent scams, grant scams, imposter scams... It was call center sales at its finest.

Kermit was making so much money that he managed

to live on his own in the exact same two bedroom he currently shared with Scott. He was the top scammer in his center. He was doing so well the company wanted him to start thinking about management. Similar to the debate with parents about school he did not understand why he would start a management track. The pay was not as good as those in the trenches.

He turned down promotion after promotion because he could not get the SPIFs (Sales Performance Incentive Fund) that he got on the phones. He went into that dilapidated former Toys R Us five days a week for twenty-one months. He built his bank account up, even while splurging on his apartment, car, and random gadgets, to nearly a hundred seventy-five grand.

Lucky for him he never took the promotion as that February when he parked his Porsche around the corner from his employer he could already see the red and blues lighting up the street. Kermit knew instinctively that he needed to just keep driving and forget that he ever worked with Trust Us Inc.

Of course, his employment was unofficial. There were no records of who he was, just the hearsay of the other employees. Since he did not quite make it in that day he ended up avoiding arrest or any real responsibility for his actions over the previous couple of years.

Those who did happen to be on shift when the cops arrived were given a lovely forty-eight hour stay in the local lockup. They either received a small fine with some

community service or were allowed to walk free if they named some of their managers.

The owners of the company were off in some far away land called Bangkok where they avoided any punishment from the United States law enforcement. They were hidden behind many VPNs, masked numbers, and location simulators. They were hidden in a similar fashion to the phones at call center. Without a lot of technical hacking type work, the phones appeared to be coming from a company in China that was routed through India that was masking itself to look like it was from the United States. It seemed like a lot of work to make phone calls from the US to the US, but after the raid, it made more sense.

Since the owners were out of reach of law enforcement, the managers took the beating. They were hit with fraud, deception, theft, and money laundering in the first round of charges. The eight of them ended up being sentenced to more time than most violent criminals.

After that scare Kermit tried to walk the straight and narrow. It wasn't because he was afraid of the law, but the people who took the fall. He did not know who ratted out the company, but with him walking away unscathed he was worried what other people would think.

Of course, the worldwide pandemic that kept everyone locked up in their house for six months, more for those in certain parts of the country or the world, put a damper on life in general. Kermit lived off his savings for a while, but a year later, when his bank account had dried up to

under fifty thousand he started to get the picture that he had to find something else to help him.

The television snapped off ending the high pitch buzz that had engulfed the room. Scott hopped up to his feet from the couch rattled his keys as if he was taunting an infant, “Ready to go?” His red hair, buckteeth and acne that had not realized he was past his teenage years always made Scott look a bit like a caricature. If he wanted, he probably could have sued a dozen local computer repair companies for using his likeness with their animated geeky worker logos.

The two rode in Scott’s ten-year-old Hyundai Santa Fe the eight blocks to get to the local grocery store. Their time spent together was typically meaningless. As usual on the ride they mumbled the words to songs on the radio together while pointing out attractive women in the cars they passed by. It was a strange connection they had that allowed them to appreciate one another’s company while not having to have any semblance of adulthood.

Walking into a grocery store in Texas in the summer is like walking into a walk in freezer. Only in places where it gets well above the hundred degree mark, sometimes well above the hundred ten mark do they understand the importance of keeping the building the opposite of the temperature outside. There was so much air conditioning trying to keep that huge building under seventy degrees that the force of wind when the doors parted caused a bit of effort to enter. It is the same in the opposite side of the year. When it is twenty degrees outside they find it necessary to warm

things up to nearly eighty degrees inside.

Scott grabbed a cart and drove through the aisles like an eight year old, attempting to ride the steel basket while gaining momentum with his feet. As he went down the aisles, he tossed random garbage foods into the basket. He threw in cookies, cereals, candy, gum, soda...

Kermit, paying attention to the hanging signs rather than his immature friend, finally found aisle fourteen where the international foods were. He thought to himself that calling prepackaged ramen noodles and international food was probably an insult to many people, but he would keep it to himself.

He knelt down on the ground to look at the different flavors. As he looked at the shelf, his heart sank. Ramen had risen to twenty-five cents a package. That was a twenty-five percent increase and the difference between three and four meals that week.

Kermit sat on his knees in the middle of the aisle staring at the sign and trying to convince his gut that he could take a day off from food. Scott came riding down aisle fourteen twenty minutes later with a basket half full of junk. The sight of his roommate silent and unmoving on the grocery store floor put him at an unease he did not like.

Over the last few months, he felt that Kermit was starting to lose his mind, so much, so that Scott had begun to lock his bedroom door at night. However, this seemed like the final straw, the final piece of the puzzle that would explain Kermit's fall into insanity.

He slowly approached the boy and laid a gentle hand on his right shoulder. Kermit looked up into the eyes of his roommate and said, "I can eat beef today, chicken tomorrow, but then I only get one more. What is more filling shrimp or pork ramen?"

Scott nodded his head slowly understanding that it was a money issue and not a small one. "Why don't you put them all in the cart? I will buy the ramen. Let's get three of each flavor."

Kermit nodded his head as he got back to his feet and dropped the square packets into the shopping cart. His mind had forgotten where he was and returned to the replaying of his recent life.

After the year alone in the apartment, Kermit reached out to some old friends. Many of them would not speak with him as he had recruited them to the job that landed them in jail for a couple of days. But, Scott was a friend from way back. They knew each other from elementary school. They met in third grade when they were both new at their school in the panhandle of Texas. Scott in his infinite eight year old wisdom had just moved to Texas from New York City where he believed he was an urbanite and better than the random rednecks of the Amarillo. Kermit on the other hand had just moved to Amarillo from Arizona. He dressed and behaved like a hippy because his family was from Bisbee, which was a community that derived its value from local art and cuisine.

Kermit by no means resembled the kids Scott was used to seeing in Manhattan, but he did not look like the

average cowboy like the majority of his class so he gravitated towards the kid. Over the course of their public school education, they would be nearly inseparable. They were best of friends spending half their time at one family's house and the other half at the other. They both got their first job at the same steak restaurant. Of course, Kermit quit after a weekend while Scott continued to serve oversized steaks to fat cowboys that thought they could overeat for a free meal. They both obsessed over bad sci-fi films. They both took the same two girls to the prom, different years almost as if they just traded off. And they graduated on the same day, moving on to become adults.

From there Kermit went on to swindle people out of a ton of money while Scott built upon a series of skills that started to build a career in adventuring. It started with scuba diving, then he moved onto rock climbing, he got a pilot's license, motorcycle license, truckers license, learned how to bushwhack, navigate by the stars, and sail. He became the go to guy for any type of adventure.

Although he loved going treasure hunting, most of the time he was recruited for late night stakeouts of haunted buildings. All the physical training he had endured was typically wasted on sitting in a dark room reading an EMF meter while a group of superstitious wimps talked about chills in the air or things moving that never moved. It did not matter much as Scott was well compensated no matter what kind of adventure he was commissioned to take.

When they returned from the grocery store, Scott

took on the parental role with his friend. He had Kermit lie on the couch and stare off into whatever the evening cop drama was playing on the television.

Scott prepared a bowl of Ramen noodles with a side of saltines to hopefully bring his roommate out of his stupor. “Here you go.” Scott placed the food down on the coffee table in front of their couch. “Why don’t you get some food in your stomach?”

Kermit nodded and turned his focus to the bowl of soup. He returned to his replaying of the last few years as he ate his food.

When Scott moved into the apartment, everything fell apart very slowly. His money dwindled. He had no skills that an upstanding company would want, so he returned to the call center world as an I.T. support person for a retail chain. This was of course after the pandemic where companies were no longer providing offices, phones, and computers. Instead, Kermit would work from his bedroom using his own phone and computer that he paid for.

The job was essentially reading a script to someone in a retail store that was having issues with their register or computer or security system. He would find their particular issue and read the script. When it did not fix their issue, he transferred them to another technical agent who had the script for the next level of urgency. He went from making ten plus thousand dollars a month to working full time and after taxes not bringing in a thousand bucks each month. With the rent, food, insurance, and general life expenditures

he continuously fell farther and farther behind until the bank account ran dry.

The first time he ran out of money Scott was away for the weekend helping someone attempt to capture a chupacabra in northern Mexico. It was the first time Kermit thought he had hit rock bottom. He would be able to go a few levels lower, but that weekend while he ate a questionable apple out of the crisper in the fridge along with an old can of beets for dinner he thought about how far he had fallen.

He enjoyed the company of Scott and of course, the money that he contributed, but over the near year, he had been there, Kermit never saw him struggle. That part put him over the edge. Kermit had crashed and burned while Scott had created this cushy and soft life himself.

The anger he felt from his roommate's success was somewhat deserved as Kermit always assumed there would be a point where he might have to take advantage of Scott to get back on his feet. Regardless of the past between the two boys, Kermit had become hardened in the scamming world and was willing to take those traits back to his real life.

Scott grabbed the bowl to return it to the kitchen. He knew that if he did not do the simple work that bowl would stay on the coffee table for weeks on end until it grew something that grossed out Kermit. Suffice it to say, Kermit was not the cleanest of people.

Scott feeling like he needed to do something to make sure his roommate and old friend was still in that lost shell of a person started a conversation, "Kermit, do you know why

I always loved being your friend?”

Kermit looked up at Scott annoyed at his luck and easy life. “No. I thought it was because I wasn’t a shit kicking asshole redneck.”

Scott ran his hand through his curly red hair and chuckled at Kermit’s blunt answer. “That is why I first talked to you. But, no. I always liked hearing your strange stories about Arizona.”

This brought a smile to Kermit’s face. He had not thought about Arizona in years. It was so far back that he had trouble remembering much about the place. His annoyance with Scott started to fade as he engaged in the conversation. “What the stories of the strange hippies? Or the putrid water that seemed to only come out at the restaurants?” He laughed at his few and broken memories.

“Actually, I was always enthralled with a story you told me about a treasure.” Scott leaned back in his chair. Facing his pudgy distraught friend, he tried to remind him of the tale he had once told him. “I believe there was a heist of some sort.”

Kermit’s eyes glazed over a bit as his mind reached for the threads of memory that remained of the story. “That’s right. In the late 1800s, there was a small sect of Grabull Indians that roamed the mountains of southeast Arizona. As America grew west, they watched from atop the mountains as their lands were taken and destroyed. They watched as their Indian rivals were imprisoned and killed.”

Scott snapped and pointed at Kermit trying to

encourage him to continue the story.

“As the colonization of America came to their mountains, they knew from watching the rest of the Indian tribes that they stood no chance against the technology and viciousness of the Americans. Rather than put up a fight they collected all of their most sacred possessions, their belts, their weapons, their herbs, their drawings of their prayers and religious stories, and most of all the one thing the colonial destroyers were after, the secret to the entrance of the gold mine. The gold was at one time the life force of the mountains they called. They put all these things into a satchel made from the skin of a cat. They gave the satchel to their shaman who pleaded to the Gods to take care of their satchel until the time came when a new generation of the Grabull tribe could take back their lands. He asked for the God of the Wind to protect all the items and all the people of their tribe with the force of the tornado. He asked for the God of the Rains to drown any man who dare to harm their tribe or steal their sacred items. He asked the God of Earth to protect the items in the satchel by raising the land to the sky where no one could access it again. And he asked the Creator God to turn the tribe into the most vicious of creatures to protect their sacred items.”

Scott was at the edge of his seat now and waiting for the big ending. “Go on!”

Kermit looked up and stared straight into his roommate’s eyes, “When the Americans who had already taken over most of Arizona came up the mountains where

the Grabull waited a great event happened. A group of soldiers confronted the tribe with their guns aimed at the Indian tribe who nearly welcomed the invasion. The men expected a fight and when they did not get one, they started taking possessions from the tribe members. When they reached the shaman and they grabbed the satchel the heavens opened up. First, a tornado took the men and threw them into the sky. Rains poured down on them as they gasped for breath and finally the mountain itself shot up from the ground and took the tribe and soldiers into the clouds where no one would ever see them again.” He paused and relished in the moment as Scott was captured by every word that Kermit said. “To this day if you find the right mountain in Arizona you will see that it rises into the clouds beyond what anyone can see. There lies the satchel, the shaman who protects that satchel and the transformed Grabull tribe protecting what’s left of their society. Many have tried to find it, but none have ever returned from Cloudville, Arizona.” There was more to the story. Something about a chosen one, some kind of reptile that would bring the Grabull of old and the Grabull of new back to Earth where they would return to their purpose and be a part of the cycles of nature. He always left that part out because he never could remember enough details to tell the tale.

“That’s the one.” Scott looked up at the ceiling as he leaned back into his chair enjoying the story that led him to his profession. “It’s inspiring, isn’t it?”

“The stupid Indian story?” Kermit was shocked that

Scott would entertain such ridiculous ideas.

“Kermit, I am a treasure hunter. You told me that story when I was eight or nine years old. After years of research and adventuring, I know that it probably isn’t a very accurate story, but it is what got me into this business in the first place. And I bet there is some truth to it.”

The conversation was starting to go so far over the deep end, Kermit started to question his own sanity. The idea that some ancient shaman put some trinkets in a purse and then enticed Gods to create a cataclysm to protect it was insanity. He threw up his hands laughing at his eccentric roommate and went to his room to get a little bit of early shuteye.

But lying in bed the story kept roaming around in his head. He kept thinking back to his childhood in Arizona with the crazy hippies that believed the story. They would have séances to try to speak to the shaman, they chanted and meditated on the hills in the presence of wildflowers. And, the more he thought about it, the more he remembered driving through southeast Arizona and seeing a mountain that rose up into the clouds.

Lying in bed falling in and out of sleep he questioned why Scott wanted to hear the story. He had talked of inspiration and truth within it. As much as Kermit did not want to think about it, Scott wanted to go searching for the treasure of Cloudville, Arizona.

The idea was ridiculous. There was no treasure. There was no Cloudville. There was nothing but a boring

ride through southeast Arizona looking for nothing. Kermit had other things to worry about. Things like money. Things like former bosses that may show up at his house to teach him a lesson in snitching. But, as he pondered the ways in which he would be beaten and tortured he started to think that maybe it didn't have to happen. Maybe he had found the purpose for Scott being his roommate.

After an exhausting night of tossing, turning, worrying, and hoping Kermit emerged from his room to find Scott still in the living with a bunch of old books spread out on the floor and coffee table.

Kermit had seen this before, Scott was preparing to go on an adventure, and this was his typical ritual for preparation. "What is all this?" Kermit posed the question with as much hesitancy as humanly possible.

"I started thinking about the Clouldville treasure. If we are going to go find it, we need to have a starting place. I looked up Grabull, Arizona, Clouldville, Indian Gods, and then all the different mountain ranges in Arizona in my tenth edition of the Britannica." Scott was speaking a million words a minute.

"Stop!" Kermit shouted which was quite out of character for him. "What do you mean if we go and find the treasure? I cannot go and find a treasure. First, I have a job I have to do. Second, I have bigger issues like how to find enough money to eat. In addition, most importantly. And don't let me downplay this at all, but it doesn't exist!" The shouting returned with the end of the sentiment.

Scott was taken aback by the abrupt and loud speech, but felt that these things were not issues. “You hate your job and make shit for money. Let’s look at it this way. Normally, when I go on a trip someone has commissioned me to do so. They pay me to help them accomplish their goal. I will commission you to help me. That way you don’t have to worry about eating or your shitty job.”

Scott kept talking, but Kermit was trying to process that he was just offered money. It was better than he expected. He had started developing a plan where he could sublet the apartment while they were gone and hopefully be the ones to meet his former managers if it must happen, but if Scott was going to pay him on top of that. It was as if his world of troubles saw a temporary relief point. He knew it was not a solution to all his issues, but it felt like the event that needed to happen to get his scamming skills back on track.

“I have found multiple mountain ranges in these books that appear to be obscured by google maps, so there may be something in one of those places. I also have found pieces of the story that you told me in the Indian Gods section of the encyclopedia, but it isn’t as detailed as what you...”

Kermit, still not listening, interrupted his best friend. “How much?”

Scott stopped talking and raised a single eyebrow. “How much of what? How much detail did you provide that I couldn’t find in...”

“How much are you going to pay me to come with you?” He knew that it was poor form to ask at that exact moment, but his mind would not let him think of anything else. If he did not ask, everything Scott said would have drifted right on by.

“Oh.” Scott thought for a minute. “How about this. I will cover all our bills here as well as our expenses while we are searching. That way you don’t have to worry about anything.”

“I have to quit my job. What do I do when we are done and I have no job?” He did not mean to ask the question, it just slipped out. His habits from his old job were kicking in. He smelt money and was pushing for all he could get. His gaze fell to his feet trying to appear ashamed for demanding support from his friend.

“We will find you another shitty job before I ask you to start picking up your half again. Plus, we will split what we find so we should be rich by the time we come back anyway.” Scott had a huge grin on his face and was rubbing his hands together with excitement.

Although the conversation was what was needed to get both of the young men on board with the trip it was also what sealed their fate from ever returning to that dingy apartment. It was the adventure of a lifetime and they were both committed to seeing it through.

Excited for a break from his internal worry, Kermit spent the next few days burning through the large stash of Ramen noodles that Scott had purchased. Without a care for

money he wanted the next most important thing to him, to feel satisfied.

Scott on the other hand kept himself busy with his research. He learned as much as he could about the legend, the area, and the Grabull. His preparation was something he always prided himself in being the best in. He had made printed out aerial maps from Google and compared it to his old Atlas that gave the topographical elevation changes. He had several spots that he wanted to investigate as the elevations were excessively high, unconfirmed, or the Google images were blurred.

With Scott fully wrapped up in his trip Kermit was able to find a small family that was interested in subleasing the apartment for however long they could get it. He had both the family and Scott depositing money into his bank account which would then cover rent with the apartment complex. He could feel that his bank account was on its way back to building up.

Scott packed all his adventure gear. The Santa Fe was packed to rims with tents, hammocks, sleeping bags, extra clothes, ton of water, fire making tools, bushwhacking tools, rock climbing gear, a vast array of weaponry ready to take on whatever the mythical beasts were in the legend. His stash included bug spray, sunscreen, first aid kits, canned oxygen, and even his scuba suit although he didn't expect to need it on a mountain in Arizona.

Once everything was packed the two young men got into the small SUV and headed out from their long term

home in Amarillo. They both planned on returning, they both expected this to be a few weeks to a few months adventure, but as the car pulled out of the parking spot they both felt the change in their world. Some part of each one of them knew their life was changing at that moment, they hoped it was for the better, they hoped it was the last time they would have to think about money. No matter what it was they were both committed to following through whether that meant wandering around Arizona until they found nothing or if it meant climbing a mountain into the sky and facing a hoard of vicious animals that were summoned by an ancient creator, they were both ready and willing to let their lives change.