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### **Dancing Weeds of the Mesas**

Looking high above the dry New Mexico mesas, I watched the dark, heavy clouds finally break, releasing a mesmerizing rainfall onto the thirsty soil. I have always loved that sharp, damp aroma of rain on dust, but on this day, my eyes were drawn to something far smaller: a colony of harvester ants rushing to secure their home against the storm. In their urgent choreography, I saw the very "biology and mathematics" that Joy Harjo insists we can find if we only stop to study a single leaf. I realized my mistake—the very "ignorance" Aldo Leopold cautioned against—was questioning the purpose of such tiny creatures in the first place. Watching them, I shed the role of a master standing above the world and became, instead, a plain member of a vast, interconnected community.

Watching them more closely, I observed two ants laboring over a single grain of rice. They struggled initially, but through a silent, urgent teamwork, they hoisted the weight and fell into step with their teammates. It was a masterpiece of coordinated silence. Their movements were a living study in the biology and mathematics Joy Harjo describes—a complex beauty found in a tiny, perfect structure. Unlike humans, these ants require no director to dictate the path; they rely on the collective knowledge of the colony to navigate the desert floor. Often, we dismiss small lives like ants or useless shrubs simply because they offer no obvious function to us, falling into the trap of ignorance Aldo Leopold warned of when he asked, what good is it? Yet these ants proved they do not need to be beneficial to humans to have value. By moving waste and cycling nutrients, they are essential cogs in the mechanism of the world. They taught me that every member of the land community is good simply because they exist as part of the cycle of life.

As I shifted my focus from the ants to the horizon, I watched the dark brown mesas soak in the rain. To a casual voyager, these rocky giants might seem like useless piles of stone that offer no water or room for vegetation. This perspective is the exact mistake Aldo Leopold cautioned against: asking "What good is it?" simply because the land provides no immediate human benefit. However, by following Joy Harjo's advice to study the mesa as I did the ants, I saw its perfect structure. I found mathematics in the layered strata of rock, each line a page of history, and harmonious poetry in the gentle swaying of the dry weeds. The mesa is not an empty space; it is the foundation of the community Leopold spoke of. I realized that to travel the whole world and call this landscape "empty" is to truly learn nothing.

By observing the harvester ants and the rugged mesas, I have learned that we are merely a small part of nature's creation, not its owners. I have discovered the mathematics and biology embedded in my own New Mexico backyard—lessons found in the very things' others might dismiss as useless. These small, overlooked lives taught me that we do not give the world its value; instead, we are simply characters in its vast, unfolding story. As I move forward, I will no longer ask what good is it but will instead listen to the poetry the land has been reciting all along.