

# North of Roswell



*By*

**DICK HARVEY**

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I dedicate this book to

**Red**

## Prologue

On a starlit night in July of 1947, something occurred in the desert between Corona and Roswell New Mexico that came to be known as the Roswell Incident. An object fell from the sky onto the Foster Ranch and was subsequently discovered by the ranch foreman, William "Mac" Brazel. Mac reported his discovery to Sheriff Wilcox who called the near by Army Air Field and reported the incident.

On July 8, The RAAF issued a news release that they had recovered a flying disc that had crashed on a ranch near Roswell New Mexico. Within a matter of hours, it was all over the country that the Air Force had captured a flying saucer. The word was that they also had recovered alien bodies. A few days later The RAAF retracted their statement and The Eighth Air Force in Fort Worth issued a subsequent news release stating that there was no flying disc and that the recovered material was from a top-secret weather balloon. Mac Brazel in turn gave the press a statement that dismissed the weather balloon theory, stating that he had retrieved many weather balloons from the ranch in the past. He was quoted in the Roswell Daily Record as saying "I am sure what I found was not any weather observation balloon"

A flurry of newspaper articles followed from around the country. The Sacramento Bee ran the headline, "Army reveals it has flying disc found on ranch in New Mexico."

"Experts" and locals alike were interviewed at length, each with conflicting opinions. There were also numerous reports of military cover ups with accusations as far reaching as the white house. There are many that believe a space ship was indeed recovered along with the bodies of aliens and taken to a top-secret location known as "Area 57".

In the 1990's the air force issued reports that they claimed accounted for the debris found and for the reports of recovered alien bodies. The reports identified the debris as coming from a top-secret government experiment called Project Mogul, which involved balloons carrying microphones and radio transmitters. The supposed purpose of this equipment was to monitor nuclear tests by the Russians. They claimed that some of the reports of recovered aliens resulted from misidentified military experiments using anthropomorphic dummies. Others were reportedly misidentified human bodies from military accidents.

The first book on the subject "The Roswell Incident" by Charles Berlitz and William L. Moore was published in 1980. Since then there have been articles, books and television specials too numerous to mention. Many of these publications and programs allude to a government cover-up.

During the time leading up to the incident and for a period after, there were numerous reports of lights in the skies over the desert. Some of these sightings appeared to be from credible sources, while others were obvious hokum.

Even among UFO proponents, the Roswell incident stirs controversy. Theories about the

incident range from belief that alien bodies were recovered along with an alien spacecraft to the whole incident being a giant hoax. Some researchers believe that the crash occurred closer to Corona than Roswell, while others think that there wasn't any crash. Even others believe that this was only a single incident among many crashes in the area.

There are almost as many theories about the Roswell incident as there are people that have heard of it. The incident has become a popular subject for novels, movies and television shows. The town of Roswell New Mexico has become a tourist attraction, catering to UFO seekers. In addition to the "believers" that descend on Roswell are the merely curious and the ones who think of it as a joke. Regardless of why they come to this little desert town, they do come, and they come in large numbers. The result being that a sizable contingent of Roswell's commercial livelihood derives from the UFO incident of 1947.

Controversy has raged, died out and rekindled anew for over six decades. As time passes, it seems less and less likely that the debate will ever be resolved. Of course, there are many on both sides that claim that it has already been resolved, and that the evidence is irrefutable.

Regardless of what took place that night in the dessert of New Mexico, the incident remains as a part of our western lore, if not history.

## **The Curse**

## Chapter One

That morning when Matt Macklin awoke his life was much the same as always. Matt was a 79-year-old rancher. Although he no longer ranched, he was the epitome of most folk's notion of a cowboy. He was six foot two slim and muscular for his age. He wore cowboy boots, jeans and a western hat that had seen better days. He favored long sleeved cowboy shirts year round, even during the hottest days of summer. Although his body had softened somewhat in his old age and had even developed a slight paunch, he still stood straight and walked with a purpose. Matt's hair, although almost pure white now, was mostly still there. He kept it short on the sides and combed straight back. Most people couldn't have said whether he had hair or not since he was rarely seen without his hat.

Matt's wife, Jeanie, had died ten years ago and even though they had not seen eye to eye through most of their marriage, he still missed her. His ranch was thirty miles north of Roswell New Mexico, it being the nearest town. Since his wife's death he had lived a solitary life save for an ancient lab mix by the name of Toby.

His ranch was adjacent to the fabled Foster ranch known for the UFO incident in 1947. Matt didn't believe in UFO's and felt that his hometown had turned into a cartoon caricature. He was old enough to remember when the incident happened and being a teenager, he was excited about it at the time. The whole thing died out quickly though and no one thought much about it after awhile, except for a few kooks. Then suddenly, he thought it was sometime in the sixties or maybe seventies, it all started up again and this time it just wouldn't die out.

He had never cared for the crowds of tourists and the silly little shops strung up and down the main drag of Roswell peddling their ludicrous trinkets. What he disliked the most though was the UFO seeking tourists creating traffic on the state road that bisected his ranch. When he was a boy, you could have stood by the mailbox for two hours without ever seeing a car. He thanked his lucky stars that you could not see the highway from the house. His great grand father, Colin Macklin, had enough sense, or foresight, to build almost a mile from the highway even though it had been only a trail when he built the ranch house and a small one at that. When he was a child he could occasionally see the dust cloud from passing cars, however, since the road had been paved traffic passed unnoticed.

Matt knew his great grandfather only as a legend imparted to him by his father. To Matt he was larger than life ramrod straight and tougher than barbed wire. He had come to New Mexico from Scotland via Canada. He carved his ranch out of wilderness while fighting off Indians, banditos and cattle rustlers in addition to battling the elements.

Colin had a mail-order bride from Virginia named Maude that he had ordered sight unseen from an ad in a newspaper. She was twenty years his junior and thin to the point of frailty. When Colin saw her step off the stagecoach, his first thought was that she wouldn't live out the year, as it turned out she out lived her husband by thirty years. Their only issue was Matt's grandfather Jacob. Colin died from injuries that were the result of trying to break a mustang at the age of seventy-two. His son Jacob was fifteen years old when Colin died.

Jacob took over the running of the ranch and head of household immediately following the funeral. He ordered his mother much as his father had, and without any sign of resistance. He also showed the ranch hands that he would tolerate no slackening of output because of his youth.

Soon after his father died, Jacob knocked one of the hands unconscious with an axe handle for his reference to working on a ranch ran by women and children. When the man came to Jacob gave him a months pay, thirty dollars, and sent him packing.

Jacob was as tough as his father and tried to temper his son, John, with the same hardness with less than perfect results. Although Matt's father was stern and resolute, his hardness was softened somewhat with a kindness toward man and critter alike. A segment of his make up that had been severely limited in his ancestors. John was an only child, born late in his parents lives. By the time Matt came along his mother and father were his only living relatives. Although Jacob did his best to raise Matt to be as tough as the land he was to inherit, he also taught him kindness and humility.

On a shopping trip to Roswell, when Matt was ten years old, a drunken man in front of a saloon accosted his father. The man had once worked for his father and was angry over some long past opprobrium. The man ranted at John calling him an uppity rich bastard among other things. Without any acknowledgement John simply stepped aside, walked around him, got in his pickup and drove away. On the way home Matt was quiet for a long time. When he finally spoke, it was with the trepidation of a boy not in the habit of questioning his elders.

"What should I have done Son?"

"You should have said something to defend yourself Sir."

"Mathew only a fool would attempt to argue with a drunk."

"Then you should have hit him Father. He insulted you."

Jacob spoke in a stern voice.

"Three things Mathew. First, he was considerably smaller than me, two he was too drunk to defend himself and three, there is no insult in being cussed by a drunk. If you beat another man just because of pride, or just because you can you, become less of a man."

Jacob continued in a softer tone of voice.

"Sont, we are better off than many of the folk in these parts. There are those that are going to dislike you for no other reason than that. Others will respect you for the same reason. They are both wrong. It is how a man lives his life and how he treats his fellow man that deserves either respect or disdain."

"Why does that man hate you so much Sir?"

"He used to work for us and I fired him."

"Was he the one you fired for beating a horse?"

"Yes."

"Do you know why did he beat the horse?"

"The horse was startled and threw him. The worse part for him was that another cowboy saw him get thrown and laughed at him. He was too much of a coward to fight the other man and too small to let it pass, so he took it out on the animal."

Although the thought occurred to neither of them, Matt's great grandfather Colin would have shot the drunkard on the spot and Jacob would have beaten him within an inch of his life. The third generation Macklin, however, just let it pass. Had Matt thought about that he may have thought that people were getting more civilized, where as Colin would have definitely thought they were going soft.

Matt had been thinking about his life growing up on the ranch a lot lately. It was as if he was trying to commit to memory the events of his life before it ended. He thought I sure am getting maudlin in my old age. I had better stop wool gathering and finish getting ready to go. The day is wasting away. It was Monday and Matt always went to Cholla on Monday morning. Cholla was

a small town about sixty miles northwest of Roswell near Corona.

When Jeanie was alive, they drove to Roswell. Jeanie liked the bigger town with its abundance of shopping. Jeanie had lived in town as a girl and had never got over missing it. She didn't like the solitary life of the ranch. When she and Matt married, she had thought the respect of being a rancher's wife would make up for the solitude, but it hadn't. Moreover, as the years passed even the pride and gratification of being married to a large landowner dwindled. She had come to think of the land as a pariah rather than an asset. Matt though, was oblivious to the depth of Jeanie's despair. He was aware only of the fact that she wasn't very happy and would rather live in town. Leaving the ranch was of course out of the question as far as Matt was concerned. He would be buried in this ground like his ancestors before him.

What Matt never knew was that Jeanie had seen him as a stepping-stone to wealth and respect more than as a love interest. Jeanie although not exactly poor was of very modest means and viewed the heir of the Macklin ranch as wealthy. In their small town, the ranch owners were considered the elite and beside Matt was a good-looking boy. She pursued him with success and they were married shortly after graduating from high school. As it turned out it was, as the adage says, "Be careful what you wish for."

The Monday morning timeframe for shopping was Jeanie's concession to Matt because of his dislike for the traffic and crowds. On Monday mornings before the tourists were out, if you ignored the billboards and shop windows you could almost believe that Roswell was a typical small town.

Now Matt went to Cholla, but he still went on Monday. Old habits are hard to break. Although Cholla was a bit, further this town with a population of under 200 suited his taste much better.

Matt fed his dog Toby Let him out in the yard, got in his old pickup truck and started for Cholla.

As He pulled off the dirt ranch road on to the blacktop highway he thought thank God for air conditioning, it must already be eighty-five out. He couldn't help but think about the days when there were very few air-conditioned pickup trucks, even years after air conditioning became common in cars. Now even this old pickup had air, although it took awhile to get the cab cooled down after setting out in the sun. Matt had been considering getting a new truck for years, but somehow never got around to it. They had put air conditioning in the ranch house shortly after his dad died, at Jeanie's insistence. However, now that she was gone Matt went back to opening the house up during the cool desert nights and keeping it closed during the day to keep the heat out as folks had done for generations.

As Matt drove along the desert highway, his musings turned to Etty. Since Jeanie died, he had made a habit of going to Etty's Diner for bacon, eggs and coffee every Monday morning. After breakfast, he would shop for the few provisions he would need for the following week and drive back home. It took up the better part of Monday and got him off the ranch for a while. Matt thought that a weekly trip to town was a frivolous waste of time, but since he no longer ranched he had little enough to occupy his time. In the old days his father would go to town once a month if then. He always took Matt, his mother and the ranch foreman. They would buy provisions for at least a month. In the winter Jacob made sure there was adequate stores to last until the next thaw even if it didn't come until spring.

Etty was around forty and a handsome woman with a very pleasant demeanor. She was five foot five, had blue green eyes and hair that had once been strawberry blond, but was now somewhat faded by the desert sun and starting to show a little gray. Although she had gained a

little extra weight in the last few years, she still had a very nice figure and like most good-looking women was aware that men liked looking at her. Matt enjoyed talking to her on his weekly visits. Of course talking with just about anyone was a respite from his almost solitary existence. Not that Matt minded being alone. When you grew up on a ranch that was fifteen miles from its nearest neighbor you learned to entertain yourself.

Even after he married Jeanie, they had never visited or entertained much. Matt had sometimes wondered why she was so set on moving to town since she didn't seem much interested in making friends. When his mother had been alive, women often stopped at the ranch to visit. This never was the case with Jeanie.

Of course, the fact that Etty was female and easy to look at didn't hurt. She was a widow woman with a son to rear. Her husband had left her very little besides the diner and that heavily mortgaged. Matt was sure that her life wasn't easy but he never heard her complain. He was fond of her and often thought that if he were thirty years younger he might make a stab at getting in her pants. He admitted to himself that at least a part of the reason for going to the diner on Monday was that it was a slow day and Etty had time to visit.

Etty's son, John, although too young for a driver's license, would occasionally drive to Matt's and fish the pond behind his house. He never took more than enough for a meal and always dropped off one cleaned and ready to cook. John was a strapping six foot three and looked every bit the quarterback that he was. He took after his mother with curly red hair and a fair complexion. Matt liked the boy and would usually allow him a beer while they chatted on the front porch. He never felt that Etty needed to know about that.

The sudden tug on the steering wheel jolted him from his reverie and was answered with a muttered complaint. He steered off the road, parked on the hard packed desert clay, got out and walked around to the passenger side. He stood looking at the flat and thinking about what a chore it would be to change it. The sweat was already starting to form under his shirt and at seventy-nine, it was no small feat to heft a fifty-pound tire and align it with the wheel studs.

By the time he had the tire changed his shirt was soaked through. He stepped across the ditch and sat down on a rock to catch his breath before putting the flat in bed of the pickup. He sat looking at the ditch that was normally two feet deep and thinking that there must have been a hell of a gully washer recently. The ditch was nearly filled level with dirt and debris. Just as he was about ready to get up something caught his eye. In the space between his feet was something shiny half buried in the dirt.

He dug it out with his fingers and examined it in the palm of his hand. It was a ball about the size of a nickel. Although it appeared to be made of some sort of metal, it wasn't the color of any metal he'd ever seen. Moreover, although not exactly translucent, it seemed that you could see into the surface. The odd thing was that holding it made him feel good, almost happy, no more like content. He also had the impression that just holding the ball had cooled him somewhat. He pondered this for a short while but decided he had an overactive imagination and it was getting past breakfast time.

He went back to the truck, rolled the flat around to the tailgate, he hoisted it into the bed and continued the drive to Cholla. Matt loved the desert and always enjoyed his Monday ride. Back when he had kept horses, he had gone riding in the desert at least once a week. He no longer had horses and most of his land was now leased to one of the large conglomerate ranches that were taking over the west. He no longer knew who his neighbors were and figured he'd probably be shot if he rode over their property. He was aware that many considered the desert dreary and unattractive. Matt thought there's no accounting for taste. Even this year with it's less than

normal rainfall, Matt saw beauty in this vast dry expanse and on a wet year such as the el Niño in 99, the desert truly bloomed.

Just outside of Cholla, four pronghorn antelope crossed the highway about a thousand feet in front of his pickup, The flash of sun off of their snow white rumps brought a sudden flash of memory, of days hunting with his father. He missed those days, and he missed his father. Truth be told, he missed his father more than he did his wife and missed his mother most of all.

Matt pulled up in front of Cholla's only diner, parked his battered pickup and stepped out into the hot desert air. It was already ninety degrees and small dust devils played across the desert behind the few clustered buildings.

## Chapter two

As Matt pushed his way through the doors of the diner, he noticed that his coffee was already on the counter. Etty gave him her familiar smile and said, "I seen you pull up."

He weaved his way through tables that seemed to be scattered about the room without any particular thought to arrangement and sat down at the counter.

Etty spoke with her usual good humor, "You're a little late today Matt. I told Chuck you were here so your breakfast should be up shortly."

"Thanks Etty, I sure can use the coffee. Had to change a flat on the way here. They're sure not making tires as light as they used to."

"I know what you mean. Things do seem to put on weight over the years, kind of like me."

"Etty, you're still just a girl. I bet those young boys that come in here are always pestering you for a date."

Although obviously pleased by the compliment Etty answered, "You've got to stop all that flattery. You're going to get me thinking about jumping your bones."

They bantered back and forth until his breakfast came. Their talk was that of two people well acquainted, but not on an intimate basis. Matt enjoyed his time with Etty. She was an intelligent woman that shared many of the same views as he did. She often asked his advice and Matt got the idea she sort of thought of him as a surrogate father or older brother. It was at times like this he wished was younger. Matt couldn't understand how she had stayed single so long since her husband's death. He figured that half the men in the county were in love with her or at least had the hots for her.

"Here's your breakfast Matt."

She slid the plate across the counter and picked up the coffee pot and another cup. She walked around the counter and sat down beside him. She refreshed his cup and poured one for herself.

"I think I'll sit and have a coffee while you eat. As you can see I'm not exactly overrun with customers anyway."

Mat enjoyed having her next to him. Had he been taken to daydreaming, he may have

convinced himself that they were together. She filled him in on the latest news and town gossip while he finished eating. He had had three cups of coffee and was about to get up when he remembered the doodad in his pocket. He pulled it out and handed it to her.

“What do you make of that Etty? I found it out on the road.”

“Damned if I’ve ever seen anything like it. I wonder if it’s valuable.”

“Doubt it. Anyway, I think I’ll hang on to it for awhile. It’s kind of interesting. I’ve got an old acquaintance at the university up in Albuquerque. I get a chance I might ask him what he thinks of it.”

She rolled the ball in her fingers for a while seeming almost reluctant return it. She was somewhat pensive for a moment and then said, “It seems like holding it makes you feel sorta comfy. That’s a silly notion isn’t it?”

Etties face blushed and she seemed about to say something but the moment passed. She dropped her eyes, almost as if she was embarrassed, and handed matt back the ball.

“I don’t know. I rather got the same feeling. Well Etty, I guess I best be on my way. I’ve got to get that tire fixed. I wouldn’t want to get caught on the road without a spare, not in this heat.”

Matt got up, dropped enough money on the table for his meal plus a generous tip and walked toward the door.

“See you next week Matt and don’t let that boy of mine pester you too much.”

“That’s a good boy Etty. It’s nice having him come around. See you next Monday.”

As Etty turned back to the counter a broad smile played across face, brought on in part by Matt’s comment about her son. John was the light of her life. There simply wasn’t enough adjectives in the English language to describe how much she loved him. Etty’s greatest fear in life was that she would not be able to provide for him or furnish him with a proper springboard for life. In the back of her mind she was aware that if she never did another single thing in his behalf that she had done a multitude more than her mother ever had for her. Still she worried.

Matt pulled up to the pumps at Jake’s Conoco Station, and was pumping gas when Jake walked out to say hi.

Jake was wearing a pair of bib overalls that were so dirty and worn that they had developed a shine. Matt wondered fleetingly if Jake ever washed his clothes or just wore them until he wore them out and then bought new ones. He had a rag hanging through the hammer loop that used to be red. Matt couldn’t imagine anything being cleaner for being wiped with that.

“Hi Jake. I’ve got a tire in the back that needs fixing. Think you could take care of it while I get a few things over at Hazels?”

“Hazels home today. Dropped a can of beans on her toe day fore yesterday. I think it was those Mex refried beans in the jumbo size. Turns out, she broke the dang thing. Doc up in Albuquerque told her to stay off it for a few days. Looks like you’re in for a bit of a drive.”

“That’s okay. It’s nothing that can’t wait till next week. You may as well go ahead and fix that tire. I’ll just have a soda and wait for it. I was just over at Etty’s. She didn’t mention anything to me about Hazel’s toe.”

“That’s odd. Etty keeps everyone in town up on the latest. When I go over for lunch I’ll tell her she’s not keeping up with her job.”

“Now don’t you go getting me in trouble with Etty.” Mat said with a smile. “She’s got the only diner in these parts.”

Jake Laughed and walked to the back of Matt’s truck. He took one look at the tire and allowed as how Matt would be better off just wrapping tape around the rim.

“I know she’s pretty bad Jake but just go ahead and fix her. I intend on getting a new set before winter.”

“Okay Matt, but I’d be afraid to use that even for a spare.”

Jake broke down the tire and took it off the rim. He called Matt over to have a look at it.

“I don’t know what you ran over but that tire is beyond fixin. Look Matt I got a used one back there that’s purty good. I’ll sell it to you for twenty bucks includin the mounting.”

“That’s a deal Jake. Don’t look like I’ve got much choice anyway.”

About half way home, Matt’s eyes began to blur. His first thought was that he was out in the middle of nowhere and having a stroke. He pulled off the road and contemplated his position for a while. Although his vision was getting even worse, he felt fine and he didn’t have any pain or numbness.

He decided that he better keep going and attempt to get home before dark. He didn’t own one of those new fangled cell phones and he reasoned that if he made it home he would at least have a phone. A little ways down the road, he reached up and removed his glasses. He was so shocked he almost ran off the road. He had perfect vision. In fact, he couldn’t remember ever having vision this good. Not even as a child. He pulled off the road again, got out of the truck and just stood there looking around. Everything was crystal clear. The colors were vibrant and he couldn’t believe how sharp the lines were. It was like the difference between early sixties television and the new high definition. He stood beside the road for over a half hour somewhat dumbfounded. He wasn’t sure what was happening to him, but he was almost certain that it had something to do with the little ball in his pocket.

The following morning Matt awoke with an erection, something that hadn’t happened for at least five years. While he was contemplating this situation, and thinking maybe, he should take advantage of it, he had another surprise. He had something in his mouth that felt kind of like gravel only sharper. He reached for his glasses on the nightstand and for a moment was confused that they were not where they he always left them when he went to bed. Then he remembered that he no longer needed glasses. He processed that for a bit and then returned to the problem of having gravel in his mouth. He spit the material into his palm and immediately realized that it was fillings. He

ran his tongue over his teeth but couldn’t detect any holes. He did, however, feel small bumps in the gaps where he had missing teeth.

He almost leaped from the bed, ran to the bathroom and looked at his mouth in the mirror. All of his teeth were completely intact. He knew the fillings in his hand wouldn’t account for all the ones missing. He figured he must have swallowed some during the night. On further examination, he found that all the gaps in his teeth had new teeth emerging.

He kept examining himself in the mirror. He though he looked younger. Then he realized that all of his tiny hairline wrinkles had disappeared. The loose skin around his neck appeared much tighter and his hair was thicker and darker. He went back to the bedroom and got dressed in a cowboy shirt and jeans. He thought as he buckled his belt that he was loosing weight. He returned to the bathroom, stepped on the scale and found that he had actually gained a little. He, however felt that he was definitely thinner. He stayed in the bathroom for quite a while; he just couldn’t stop looking at himself in the mirror.

After awhile he kind of shook himself and walked out to the kitchen. Even after ten years, he still thought of it as Jeanie’s kitchen. Old Toby was lying on a rug in front of the sink. Toby was a lab shepherd mix that Jeanie had found out at the end of the ranch road by the mailbox when he was just a pup. She had allowed as how someone had just dumped the poor thing there and that

the coyotes would have eaten him if she hadn't come along. She carried on about that for quite some time, but the upshot was that they had a new dog. Toby was almost thirteen years old now and had cataracts to the point that all he could see was shadows, but he still looked up when Matt came in the kitchen. He got to his feet and walked over to Matt who reached down and scratched behind his ears.

"You want to go outside old boy?"

Toby looked toward the door and Matt started in that direction. It took Toby awhile and Matt slowed down to wait for him. He let him through the door, helped him down off the porch and went back inside to fix breakfast. In the years since Jeanie's death he'd gotten in the habit of making the same meals for himself and Toby

Glancing upward he said, "Jeanie, I know it's not good for him but it makes him happy and he hasn't long to go anyway."

That's when the thought struck him. He reached in his pocket, got the ball and returned to the porch. He called Toby over and knelt down beside him. He rubbed the ball over his head and along his back under the fur. Toby wagged his tail harder than he had for quite some time. Matt couldn't help but think about how good it made him feel to hold the ball. Matt patted Toby on the head, went back in and finished breakfast. When breakfast was ready, he went out and helped Toby up the steps.

After breakfast, He cleaned up the dishes and went out to take care of his few chores. He no longer kept animals except for a few chickens, for the eggs. He had sold the last of his horses the year before. He didn't ride anymore and he couldn't stand the thought of them starving to death if he was to die. He worried about Toby also, he thought if I was to die out here, it could be weeks before anyone knew about it. It seemed that maybe now he wouldn't have that worry. It was starting to look like he might have a few years left in him after all.

He did keep a small garden, mostly to putter. He had given up on canning the year after Jeanie died. He still had the old Farmall he used for turning the garden and he still kept it in good running condition. It, along with it's attachments, and an ancient jeep was about all the rolling stock that he kept when he auctioned off the ranch equipment. He went to the garden and walked through the rows picking any weeds that he noticed. He figured it would be at least a month before anything was ready for harvest. He walked over to the spigot and turned on the dribbler system. He looked at his watch and decided to let it run for a few hours. He did that every other day for an hour or more depending on how hot it had been. The thought crossed his mind that everything was much easier now. He didn't tire as easy and felt more enthusiastic about doing chores that had began to wear on him over the last few years.

He had about given up on Jeanie's flowerbeds, but the next day he spent a couple of hours weeding, cultivating and pruning them. He watered the beds and stood for sometime looking them over. He thought a couple more weeks of attention and they would look as good as ever.

For the rest of the week it went like this. He continued to get stronger and more youthful. He had all of his teeth now including his wisdoms that he'd had pulled in the Army when he was twenty-two. They were white and straight, even more so than when he was young. His jaw line was firm and straight. His hair was the dark shiny brown of his youth. Not only had his short-term memory improved, but he seemed able to recall everything he had ever read, seen or heard. He took to watching Jeopardy and some of the other game shows on television and it was getting to be rare that he didn't know the answers.

By the end of the week, he felt that he was about the equivalent of thirty and still getting younger. His energy level may have been this high in his youth but it was all new to him now.

That morning he had run out to the mailbox and back just for fun.

On Tuesday, the day after he had rubbed Toby with the ball, Toby had put his front paws up on the bed in the morning and looked at him with clear eyes. Moreover, although he could hardly walk a week ago, Toby had run to the mailbox and back with him that morning.

When Monday came, He decided to go to Roswell for supplies. There was no way he could go to Cholla. He figured no one in Roswell would recognize him especially now. He had been trying for the last few days to figure out what to do. It was obvious to him that he couldn't stay where he was. Since he quit working the ranch his only income was from the lease and social security. The income from leasing provided a small income and paid the taxes. Along with social security it was enough to live on since his needs at this time were minor. He had figured there was plenty enough to last the rest of his life but things had suddenly changed. He did have investments but wasn't sure how much of that he could liquidate over the phone or internet. He was sure he could sell his stocks and mutual funds since he had done business with his broker over the phone for years, but his other holdings were likely lost for practical purposes.

He wasn't destitute by any means and well off by most folks meaning of the words, but it was obvious that he was going to have to get a job before long. The problem was that the only thing he knew how to do was cowboy and there wasn't much call for cowboys anymore. He obviously couldn't continue drawing social security, in fact, he didn't know how he would explain who he was and why he was living on the Macklin ranch if any one he knew showed up at the door. Unless, that is he wanted to spend the rest of his life in the booby hatch.

He gave some thought to turning the ball over to people at the university and letting them figure it out. The trouble was with something of this potential, he didn't trust anyone to do the right thing and on top of that, he didn't want to part with it.

On the way back from Roswell, he looked over at the passenger seat and said, "Toby, what if we get stopped? I can't show them my driver's license I'll go straight to jail and when they can't find me I'll likely be brought up on murder charges. There's no possible way for me to prove who I am. I've never been finger printed nor had my DNA taken. I'm in deep trouble."

Toby cocked his head and listened, but he had no answer. Matt spent the rest of the day pondering what to do about his situation. He thought about the ranch and knew he was about to lose something very dear. Something that had been in his family for so long that it was almost like the air he breathed. As hard as he tried, he couldn't think of a way to keep it or even sell it. That again raised the question of how he was going to make a living. He had been on the ranch his entire life and had never held a job for pay.

Matt stopped ranching about five years after Jeanie died. He had been aware for some time that that his mind was not what it had once been. Although his mental acuity was diminished, he was aware that the ranch was going down hill. Then one sunny afternoon while Matt relaxed on the front porch with an iced tea he had a visitor.

He had watched the dust trail of the car coming up the ranch road with curiosity and watched as the car pulled into the yard and stopped. When the dust had settled his friend John Thomas with whom he had banked for years stepped from the car. Matt walked out to greet him, made small talk as they walked backed to the porch and then said; "have a seat. I'll get you a cold tea."

As John sat drinking his tea, Matt spoke.

"You look like a man with something on his mind John. What's up?"

"Matt, I don't know any easy way to say this so I'll just spit it out. Tony's been robbing you blind."

Matt felt as if he had been sucker punched. Tony Barnes was Matt's ranch manager. He had

started on the ranch as a cowboy, had been top hand, foreman and had been the ranch manager for the past two years.

“I’ve been suspicious for some time, but I didn’t want to say anything until I was sure.”

“And now you’re sure?”

“Yes I am. I’ve been auditing your accounts for the last few months and your income is nowhere near what it should be for the cattle sales you’ve had. Moreover, your bank withdrawals are much larger than normal for ranch expenses, and I’m seeing paychecks cashed for people I’ve never heard of.”

Shaken, Matt asked John if there could be some explanation other than what he had concluded, but knew the answer even before it came. He was at an utter loss for words. He felt almost like he had gotten word that a close friend or family member had died. He sat for a long time mulling it over in his mind and finally confessed to his friend his misgiving about his abilities.

“What would you like me to do Matt? I will do anything I can to help.”

“Well I guess the first order of business is to fire Tony.”

“Fire him hell! You need to have him arrested and see how much of your money can be retrieved.”

“No John, I’m an old man, I guess I won’t miss the money all that much.”

Matt was stunned as much by his inability to recognize what was happening as he was by his manager’s duplicity. He fired Tony that day. A week later he had his foreman round up the cattle and sell them. He then contacted his friend John and had him arrange for an auction to sell the ranch equipment. After the auction, he paid his foreman two years pay, the rest of his hands a year’s pay and he was out of the ranching business.

The irony was that although his mind was now sharper than it had ever been, and he could easily go back to ranching, now there was no way for him to keep the ranch.

On Tuesday morning, while he was making breakfast, he heard steps on the porch and froze.

“It’s me, Etty. You didn’t come for breakfast yesterday.”

He thought she knows I’m here my pickups in the yard and the doors standing wide open. Besides Toby was standing at the screen looking up at her wagging his tail, he had to answer the door.

“Just a minute.”

He turned the heat off under the eggs, walked to the front door, and got another shock. Etty’s clothes hung loose on her and she looked about twenty years old. He had always thought of Etty as good looking but now she was beautiful.

“You to?”

“Yeah. Me too.”

Etty looked Matt up and down and then said, “My God, look at you. You’re really handsome.”

“Thank you.”

He would have returned the compliment, but he was too discombobulated to think straight.

“What are we going to do Matt?”

He pushed the screen door open and said, “Come in, I’m in such a state I’ve forgotten my manners. I was just fixing breakfast. Would you like some?”

“No thanks I’ve already ate. I was up early trying to figure out what to do. Matt We have got to explain to people about the ball. I thought we should do it together.”

“Etty we can’t let anyone find out about this. Does anyone else know?”

“No, soon as people started noticing the change in me I faked the flu and stayed home. It took me awhile to figure out what was going on but then I remembered that gismo of yours and figured that had to be it. Yesterday morning I drove out to the edge of town and waited for you to come by. I guess it didn’t occur to me that you would be in the same shape as me. Matt I’m beside myself. I sure can’t keep this secret very long and if I tell anyone what happened they’d put me in the funny farm for sure. I thought if we told people together and showed them the ball we could make it okay.”

“Etty we can’t tell anyone about this. If this gets out our life will be over.”

“But Matt, They are going to find out whether we tell them or not, besides we could cash in on this thing. Matt, before I’ve had a meager existence at best, but at least it was an existence. Now I have nothing unless we capitalize on this. With what it can do, we’d never have to work another day of our lives.

This was a side he’d never seen of Etty, it struck him that she might never have been happy in Cholla and was now thinking she had found a way out. He realized now that he had been blind to her situation. Somehow he had to make her understand the danger in this situation in which they now found themselves. Etty sounded dejected, “Matt, what can we do if we keep it a secret? You might be able to get by but I have no resources and I have a son that looks about four years younger than me.”

“Etty, I’ve spent the last week thinking this over from every angle. If this gets out, I’m sure I won’t live out the year. There are people that would kill me for ten bucks. What do you think they would do to get their hands on this thing? At the very least, I’d have a crowd of screaming people from my front porch all the way to the highway wanting to be healed or made young again. I couldn’t get to my truck without being trampled to death.”

“But the authorities could protect us. God Matt, this isn’t the “Wild West”.”

“No Etty, it’s not the “Wild West”, but there is not enough police in the world to protect us if this gets out. The only way we could be protected is if they locked us up. Even then, I’m not sure. Beside all that, I don’t trust the cops much more than I do the crooks. We’ve got to figure out a way to keep this thing secret. Before you showed up, my plan was to sell what stocks I have, clean out my bank accounts and just drive away. I could empty my bank accounts with my ATM card in less than three months and I think I can sell my stocks over the phone. The hardest part would be figuring out how to get a new identity. But, that was before you showed up.”

“You could just walk away from your ranch?”

“Actually it’s your ranch. I put it in trust for you two years ago.”

Seeing the surprised look on her face, Matt said, “Don’t start in. I have no kin and for the last six years, you’ve been the closest thing I have to a friend. Besides I thought John would take care of Toby.”

Etty had an incredulous look on her face and when she spoke, her voice had a slight tremble.

“I don’t know what to say Matt.”

“Then say nothing. That’s usually best anyway. However, none of that is relevant anymore. Right now, we have to figure a way out of the mess we’re in. Maybe it’s not that bad for you. Your not that old, you could lay low for awhile and then tell everyone that you went to a spa got in shape, maybe had a face lift.”

“Yeah, right. They’ll buy that.”

“Do you have any money that you can get your hands on?”

Etty looked startled, “Money? Not a dime, we live week to week and if we have a slack week I can’t even pay the bills. I’ve been thinking of turning the place into a coffee shop. It seems

most days I throw out more food than I sell. I guess it doesn't matter now, I can't go back there anyway."

"Etty, What are we going to do about John, does he know?"

"No. Luckily he and his buddy Sean went over to The Valley of Fire for a week of camping."

"I don't know Sean."

"Sean Proudfoot, He's an Indian Boy that John's friends with, they're on the football team at school."

"Etty, as much as I hate letting anyone more in on this, I guess John has to be told. I just can't see anyway around that but you know how hard it is for a teenager to keep a secret.

They sat at the kitchen table and talked for some time. Finally Matt said, "Etty, here's what I propose. You go back home and wait for John. When he gets back, you tell him what's happened and bring him back here. Don't say anything to anyone, just take what you want, close up the house and drive away."

"Trailer."

"What?"

"Trailer, we live in a trailer."

"Same thing."

"What if someone comes looking for me or, for that matter, just shows up here?"

Matt took so long to answer that Etty was starting to think he hadn't heard her, but then he said, "Some people in Cholla know where I live but I can't imagine them thinking you would come here. When you get back here put your car in the barn and if anyone comes while I'm not here just don't answer the door. In the meantime, I'm going to call my broker, have him sell everything and deposit the cash in my checking account. Today I'll start drawing six hundred dollars a day with my ATM card. That's the most I can get a day from the ATM and I sure can't walk into the bank and make a withdrawal. Within a week, we will have some working capital and in the meantime, we can try to figure out what we are going to do.

"Matt I'm just beside myself. You can't possibly understand this, but I thought I had finally made a life for myself and now I don't know what I'm going to do."

Matt could see how agitated she was and thought for some time before answering.

"I don't want you fretting yourself Etty. I don't quite know how I'm going to handle this yet, but you can rest assured that I won't abandon you. I feel responsible for what's happened to you and I'm going to do my best to make it right. No matter what answer I come up with it will include you and John being taken care of."

A week after Matt started withdrawing from his checking account, the bank called. They wanted to know if he was Mathew Macklin. When he said he was, they asked for his social security number and his checking account number. The upshot was that they were worried about the unusual withdrawals. He said, "I'm not giving you that information over the phone. How do I know you're who you say you are?"

He was certain that the person he was talking with was with his bank, but he thought it best to answer as he normally would. He finally spoke with his friend John, the president of the bank. He recognized Matt's voice and Matt convinced him that there was nothing wrong.

Early the following Friday morning, Matt gave Etty most of the money he'd taken out of his account and packed a suitcase. Matt and Etty had discussed him going until late the night before. She was against it but Matt saw no way around it.

He was saying goodbye on the front porch when she suddenly threw her arms around his neck, pressed her body against his and kissed him. Her tongue darted between his lips and

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