



Marty ran her hand along the now smooth surface of the antique oak library table. The table would have fetched a much higher price if she'd been able to save the finish, but forty years in Mrs. Johnson's garage covered with only a plastic tarp had taken a heavy toll. Still, the wood was good, and the carved women's heads on the legs fascinated her. Each one was a different face—famous women from history? Maybe Paul would recognize them or tell her how to research their identity. Unless they were women in the craftsman's family.

Finding an unusual piece and restoring it to an approximation of its original condition was the part of her business she loved. Sales and the maintenance of a showroom, not so much. One of these days her tiny business would grow into a small business, and she could afford to hire Carly full-time. Carly was learning the ropes quickly. An outgoing young woman who never met a stranger, she was already a better salesperson than Marty.

She turned on the sander and went back to work. Who had owned this table? Who would buy it? What use might it be put

to now? A light tap on her back made her jump. No one was supposed to be here. Paul was at the Park, Scott at the shop with Carly, and Reed at the hardware store.

She whirled, holding the spinning sander in front of her almost like a shield.

Paul jumped back, holding his hands up as if in surrender. Marty turned off the sander and put it on the table. "Paul! What are you doing home so early? You scared me."

Paul wrapped his arms around her and kissed her.

She melted against him. Sometimes she still couldn't believe it. She had actually married Paul. It had been almost a year now. Every single one of her misgivings had turned out to be baseless. She put her arms around his neck and pulled him down for another kiss.

He laughed and stepped back. "Marty, I want you to meet an old friend of mine." Putting his arm around her waist, he turned her toward the door.

A tall blonde woman dressed in designer jeans and an expensive top stood in the doorway. She looked like a model. Instinctively, Marty reached around to untie her work smock and take it off. Not that her khaki capris and green T-shirt were much better. At least they were clean. Taking a deep breath, Marty stepped forward and held out her hand. "I'm Marty Gr—Russell." Even after a year, she sometimes forgot her new name. Usually it didn't matter, but now it did. A lot.

"Jessie Jensen."

Paul dropped an arm around Jessie's shoulders. "We went to school together. Jessie was Linda's roommate. In fact, Jessie was the one who introduced me to Linda."

Jessie made a wry face. "The age-old story. I had a crush on Paul. I finally got him to ask me out, and then three dates later he met my roommate. That was the end of my great college romance."

They both laughed, but Marty wasn't sure that Jessie was as amused as Paul was. Had she come to Jerome to look up her old flame, assuming he was still single? Maybe she'd thought he would wait more than a year to get involved with someone else.

Marty shook off the suspicion. Absurd. Three years had passed since Linda's death. She and Paul met the year after Linda died. They'd spent a year getting to know each other. Now they'd been married almost a year. That added up to three years. Besides, how long she and Paul had spent getting to know each other shouldn't matter to Jessie. She heard herself say, "What brought you to Jerome, Jessie? It's not exactly on the way to anywhere."

Paul laughed. "That's almost exactly what I said to her."

Because it was true. The woman had to have some reason. She wasn't just stopping by.

"Let's go over to the house," he said. "I'll let her explain."

Jessie smiled, showing even white teeth. "No doubt boring to someone who isn't a historian. The short version is I'm an archaeologist working at Montezuma Well this summer."

Paul opened the door. "After you, ladies."

"You go on," Marty said. "I need to put my tools away."

Ignoring Paul and the open door, Jessie crossed to the table and ran her hand along the smooth surface. "What do you do, Marty? I can tell you're sanding, but did you build this table?"

Marty laughed. "Heavens, no! It's an old library table I found at an estate sale. I restore antique furniture."

Paul joined them. "She has a shop in Clarkdale, *Old and Treasured*, the finest antique furniture shop in northern Arizona."

"My shop is the only one that specializes in furniture."

"True. But you're building a reputation in Sedona and Flagstaff."

"Why don't the two of you go on," she said. "Paul, start a

pot of coffee. If the boys didn't get into them at breakfast, we have a few of Sofia's churros left to go with it. I'll be right there."

Jessie shook her head. "No need."

Reaching for Marty, Paul placed his hands on her shoulders and began to massage. She leaned against him, enjoying his touch. "I invited Jessie to have supper with us. She gets to know you, see Scott, and meet Reed."

Marty tried not to stiffen. Too late.

Paul turned her around to face him. "That's okay, isn't it?"

Marty managed a smile. To buy herself a moment to get used to the idea, she pulled his head down for a quick peck on the cheek. "Of course it is. I'm just surprised. I'm not exactly dressed for entertaining."

Paul laughed. "It's pizza night, and we're not entertaining Jessie, just spending the evening. The first of many, I hope. Jessie and I go way back. I want the two of you to be friends."

Marty hoped that was all Jessie wanted. Turning to face the other woman, she leaned back against Paul, feeling strangely possessive. Giving Jessie what she hoped was a warm smile, she said, "I need to warn you. Our house isn't finished. We're building it ourselves, and we're not quite as far along as we'd hoped to be by now."

Paul tipped up her head and looked affronted. "Please, darling. I think for amateurs with day jobs we've made amazing progress. Jessie, I'll have you know we have a solid foundation, straight walls, a watertight roof, and sturdy floors. The kitchen and bathrooms are all functional. The stairs even have railings."

Stepping away from him, Marty put her hands on her hips and picked up the teasing argument. "But dearest, the floors are bare, the walls need paint, and the furniture is a hodgepodge from your house, my apartment, and odds and ends from Carly's Treasure Trove."

Jessie clapped, somehow an elegant gesture. “I can’t wait to see it! I’ve never known a family who lived in a house before it was finished, much less built it with their own hands.”

Paul grinned. “Try eight hands. One of the requirements for living with the Russells is manual labor.”

“How exciting! I can’t wait to see it.”

Marty shook her head. “There’s not much to see. But if you insist, Paul can give you the tour while I put my tools away. I’ll meet you in the kitchen in fifteen.”

Marty watched them leave, two tall gorgeous late-thirties people who made a striking couple. No wonder Jessie had had a crush on Paul. When? Seventeen or eighteen years ago. Marty would have been in sixth or seventh grade. Telling herself the flutterings of jealousy were ridiculous, she picked up the sander and wound the cord around it. Still, Jessie wasn’t wearing a wedding ring. No doubt it was true the other woman was working at Montezuma Well for the summer, but why had she contacted Paul in person, at closing time, dressed for a casual night out?



REED SLUMPED AGAINST THE WALL. This couldn’t be happening! They couldn’t have filled all the positions on the very first day of interviews. Maybe if Bernie had been on the porch with the journal, he could have made it. Or if he hadn’t stopped at Bernie’s. But he needed the family’s record.

What was Bernie going to say? He was the one who’d found out about the company and told Reed about the hiring. Bernie was going to be almost as disappointed as Reed was. Should he even tell the old guy? Maybe he should just say he changed his mind and didn’t go to the interviews. But Bernie wouldn’t believe him. He would want the truth. Then he’d say,

“What are you, kid—a quitter? Why didn’t you go in there and tell them if they were out of jobs they had to make one more for you? Because you’ve got something no one else has! You’ve got the real history behind the gold in Jerome. And it wasn’t no ancient city of Cibola.”

Reed straightened up and took a deep breath. He wasn’t a quitter. He had to have this job. And Bernie was right. He had something these guys needed. He faced the door with its sign and took hold of the knob. It was probably locked, but maybe not.

His streak of bad luck changed. The knob turned, and the door opened. The long room was practically empty. At the far end, a dolly stacked with metal folding chairs announced that whatever had gone on in here was over a long time ago. In the middle of the room a scuffed wooden desk sat unattended.

The unfinished boards of the wood floor creaked under Reed’s weight, and his footsteps echoed as he crossed to the desk. His breathing sounded loud. No wonder they called this place “Spook Hall.” At least it wasn’t dark yet. The top of the desk was empty except for two wire baskets. One held blank application forms. The other, a stack of the same forms filled out. Reed picked up the forms with the names on them and flipped through. He recognized a few of the names, but not many. The age blank seemed to be filled with numbers higher than his nineteen.

A door in the back of the room opened and a round bald man hurried out. “You, there! What do you think you’re doing?”

Reed dropped the forms back into their basket and dragged out his best smile. “Just checking out my competition.”

The man grabbed the forms out of both of the baskets as if he expected Reed to steal them. “Competition? Can’t you read?”

“Yes, sir. I saw all your positions are filled, but I have something none of the other candidates have, something you need.”

The man snorted. “Just what might that be?”

“The history of Coronado’s gold in these hills.”

“You’re crazy! Coronado didn’t find any gold—not here or anywhere. That seven cities of gold report turned out to be a myth. Or don’t you know anything about your own local history?”

Reed’s temper rose a notch. The man didn’t have to be sarcastic. “What do you want to bet I know more than you do, mister?”

The man, probably three inches shorter than Reed, narrowed his eyes.

Another voice, deeper than the little round guy’s, boomed, “That’s not the best tone of voice to use if you’re trying to get an interview.”

Reed turned his attention to the source of the new voice. A tall, powerfully built man with an air of authority came through the same door, evidently from an office. Reed wanted to complain that the little round guy should change his tone of voice, but he knew that would make him sound like a squabbling child. Using his most formal voice, he said, “Yes, sir. I mean no, sir.” He offered what he hoped was a confident smile.

“I heard part of what you told Mr. Lewis. Just exactly what do you have?”

The demand put Reed on his guard. His father’s voice echoed in his head. “Never trust your quarry until you have what you want. That’s the first rule of bargaining. The second rule is to hold your cards close to your chest. Don’t let them guess too much.”

If he told them about Bernie’s journal, they could just go to

Bernie and buy it. He knew his friend wouldn't sell the original, but he might sell these two men a copy. He'd be out of a job before he even got an interview. That journal was the only card in his hand. "I have a source of some local history most people around here haven't heard of. It's been in my family for six generations." He hoped that was right. The journal had originated with Bernie's great-grandpa. It didn't matter. The point was it was really old.

The tall man quirked an eyebrow. "That long, huh? Just when was Jerome founded?"

Reed knew the answer to that one. Bernie had told him the story often enough. "The first prospectors came here in the late 1800s. My great-great uncle came in the first wave. He stayed. And he kept a journal."

Mr. Lewis snorted again. "Most of those prospectors couldn't read, much less write."

"Maybe so," Reed snapped. "But mine could. My grand uncle has the journal. It's filled with stories the old guy heard. I've read it." Oops. He'd stretched the truth there. He'd heard Bernie talk about it. But he trusted Bernie and his stories.

Mr. Lewis looked at the tall man, "Don, this kid is just wasting our time. He doesn't have anything like it."

Don, Mr. whatever his name, made a dismissive gesture. "What's your name, kid?"

"Reed. Reed Harper."

"I take it you grew up around here?"

"No. But my grand uncle's lived here all his life. When my family moved here, we looked him up." That was a spider's web of truth and lies, but Reed didn't care. He had to have this job, and Don acted interested.

"Okay, Reed. Tell me in one sentence what's in your family journal we need to know to run our business."



“One of Coronado’s men hid a bag of gold doubloons in a cave on Mingus Mountain.”

Don whistled. “Does your great-uncle’s journal say where this cave is?”

The little round guy held up his hand in a signal to stop. “But Mr. Parnell—”

“Not now, Freddie.”

Reed knew he had to be careful, give them enough to keep them interested but keep the details hazy enough they’d need him to come back and bring the journal with him. “I don’t think so, but it records stories told by the Yavapai people about some gold circles they found and made into jewelry.”

“Gold circles—like the doubloons in the legend?”

Reed shrugged. “I’ll have to double check.”

“I thought you said you’d read it.”

“He’s playing games with us boss. I bet that journal doesn’t even exist.”

Reed crossed his arms over his chest. “It exists, all right. But if I tell you everything I know, what do you need me for? I need a job. You need the information in Uncle Bernie’s journal. Let’s make a deal.”

Mr. Parnell scowled. After a tense moment, he laughed. “I like your thinking, kid! I’ll tell you what. You come back tomorrow and bring that journal with you. If it’s like you describe it, it’s given me an idea I have to think through. I just may have a job for you after all.”

Reed hitched his pack on his shoulder. “I work at the hardware store in Cottonwood.” At least he hoped he still did. But he could talk his way back into Mr. O’Riley’s good graces. “I can’t come till I get off work. Will five-thirty do?”

Mr. Lewis started to object, but Mr. Parnell nodded. “I’ll meet you here.”

Reed knew his luck had changed. He’d stop at Bernie’s on

the way home and pick up the journal. Later this evening, he'd call Mr. O'Riley and explain. Everything was going to work out.

By the time he got to his motorcycle his elation had settled into a hopeful confidence. He knew Bernie would let him borrow the journal. Maybe Bernie would even come with him and talk to the Big Boss. When Bernie told those stories, you were as sure they happened as if you'd been there. While the motorcycle was warming up, he put on his helmet. He didn't know if either of his new bosses was watching, but just in case, he wanted to look reliable.

Instead of making his own opening in the constant stream of one-way traffic on this loop through town, he waited for a generous space before he pulled out. He longed to turn around and work his way against the flow. Bernie's street wasn't that far back. But he couldn't risk it. Not that anything would happen, he could handle his motorcycle fine.

Taking a deep breath, he kept his place in line until he could turn right. While he crept behind a ten-year-old Ford pulling a pop-up camper, he tried to decide what wage he would ask for. More than minimum wage, that was for sure. He'd ask Bernie. Maybe Scott. Scott would know better what entry-level wages were for a skilled job. Because whatever idea Mr. Parnell had for him, it had to have something to do with all that history in Bernie's journal. Maybe he would be assigned to put together the background information for a flier. He'd never done anything like that, but Uncle Paul would help him with the research, and Aunt Marty had a great eye for design.

He reached Bernie's street and downshifted to make the steep grade. He parked in his usual place, took off his helmet, and locked his motorcycle. Dumping his things in a lawn chair on Bernie's porch, he knocked for the second time that

afternoon on the front door. Surely his friend was home now. “Bernie—it’s Reed! I’ve got some news!”

No answer. He peered in the front window, but everything looked just like it had before. Maybe the old guy was around back in the shack he called his workshop.

The workshop door, like something that belonged on a barn, hung open. The light was on, but no Bernie inside. The back door was unlocked, so Reed went in. “Bernie? It’s me—Reed. I’ve got some great news!” His voice echoed back to him like the house was empty. But Bernie would never have left his shop wide open like that. Maybe leave the back door unlocked, but not the shop. He had some nice tools.

“Bernie?”

Reed’s stomach knotted. This wasn’t like the old guy. Had something happened to him? Bernie wasn’t in the kitchen. A few dirty dishes were stacked in the sink, but that was normal. The living room was as empty as it had looked through the window. Ditto for the bathroom and Bernie’s bedroom.

Footsteps dragging, Reed went to check the spare room that Bernie was redoing to make into an office. The walls needed plaster, the ceiling should be lowered, and the floor was dangerously uneven. For all the time Bernie spent at his computer, he didn’t do that much work. But he loved to play solitaire on the screen. Reed thought computer game room would be a better name than office, but it was the old guy’s house. He could call the room whatever he wanted to.

“Bernie?” The name came out kind of soft. The house was too quiet. Silly to be nervous. Reed cleared his throat and tried again. “Bernie?”

No answer. Reed rounded the corner of the hall. Bernie lay on his back, half in the hall, half in the office. That uneven sill where the house had settled! Reed had told Bernie he needed to level it. He’d even tried to do it for him once, but Bernie kept

saying that doorway was like him. Kind of crooked with age, but still working just fine.

“Bernie!” Reed knelt beside his friend, but even before he touched the old guy’s face, he knew it was too late. His faded blue eyes stared up at the ceiling. And sure enough, his skin was cold to the touch. How long had he been there? If he’d taken the time to go around back instead of rushing off to the interview, could he have saved Bernie?

Reed sat back on his heels and tried to decide what to do. He should call someone, probably the sheriff. Or at least Uncle Paul. But once he made that call all sorts of things would happen in a hurry. The fire department and the sheriff’s office were less than five minutes away. He needed more time. He had to find the journal to get the job, and he knew Bernie would want him to have it. No way could he explain to the sheriff. The guy hated his guts. He actually hated his dad’s guts, but since Lloyd, Sr., had taken off and left him behind, the sheriff took his feelings out on Reed. If he called Uncle Paul, his foster father would have to call the sheriff.

Getting to his feet, he looked down at his friend’s still face. He had to close Bernie’s eyes the way he’d seen people do on TV shows, but he already knew Bernie’s skin was cold. He couldn’t just leave him like that for the sheriff to see. It left Bernie too vulnerable somehow. Taking a deep breath, he ran his hand over Bernie’s eyes, bring the eyelids down. A lump formed in his throat, but he couldn’t stop to feel anything now. He had to find that journal.