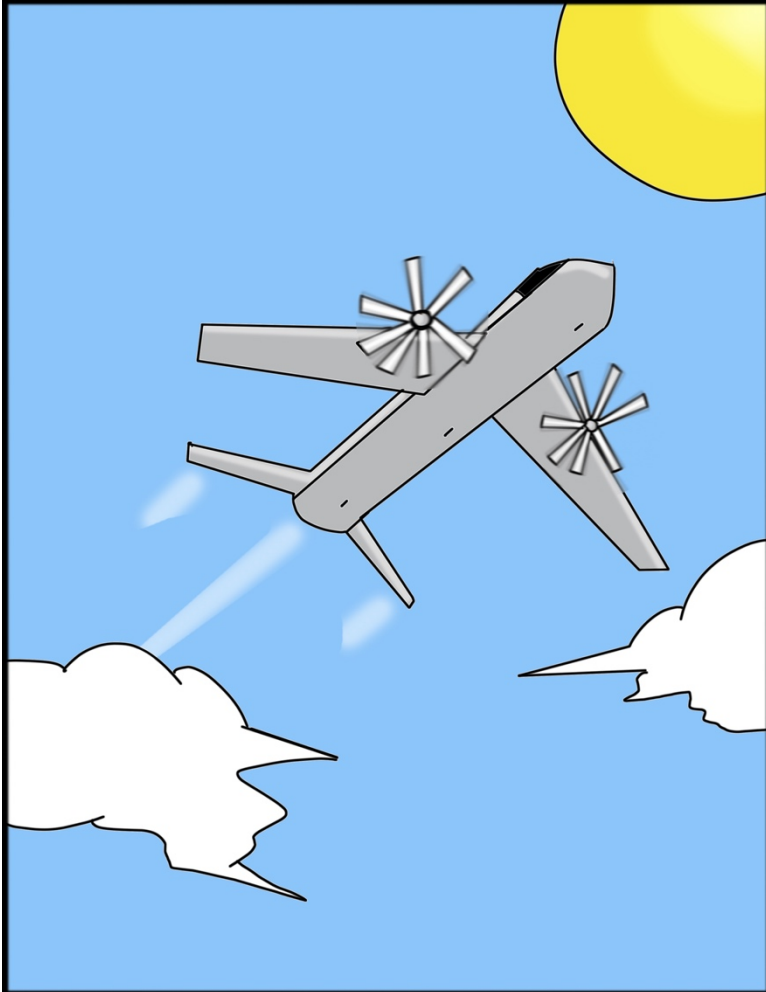


Chapter 4
“Party in TexAS”



The plane ride was rough, like the unraveling of the perfect day. An unexpected southeastern mainstream had kicked up

and caused the Captain to maneuver his plane like a roller coaster.

Sarantos never been on an actual roller coaster, but Gorilla explained it was similar, and now he decided he would never partake of the insanity. Why would he want to feel wobbly and nauseated when the ride literally went nowhere? There was no glorious treasure to be found at the end of such an experience, so what was the point? To him, that was irrational.

Give him treasure or let him be. That was his new motto. He chuckled.

“Doc, what’s so funny?” The perplexed look on his face was like that of a newborn baby who could not understand what just happened.

“Nothing, kid... nothing at all.”

“Whatever you say, Doc. Are you sure you want to sell The Lady? It would’ve been nice to drown in a bit of respect in our community instead.”

“Yeah, kid, I’m sure. The money this rich Texan rancher wants to give us for The Lady is what I consider priceless. It’ll fund us for the next ten years, maybe more. I could use

the breathing room.” He glanced at the clumpy clouds out the window to his right, feeling for a moment like he was floating on them. “Besides, there’s always more adventure, and the community will never have enough respect for us or anyone else for that matter. They live only to judge. Our future though, is a beautiful mystery!”

“Truth, Doc, but life has a way of surprising you. Leave room for the universe to work its magic.”

The Professor would agree except that he was like a moth being drawn to the flame and then consumed by it. He was tired of letting fate do its work, tired of waiting for the universe to work its magic. Soon the kid was snoring.

The kid seemed relaxed as the plane dropped, rose, and shook with the wind. It was a different experience if they followed the pattern of the wind, but to push against something natural was a farce that frightened him. What you focus on grows so he decided to focus on something different.

He reasoned he faced worse odds at least a dozen other times, but this wind was something out of his control. He liked to choose his own flow.



Charlie sat next to the kid in the seat behind him reading some magazine. He glanced her way, and she winked. Young love. When you're older, love doesn't just happen, it takes work.

"A little nervous, Professor?" They could probably smell the fear.

"Maybe. You know me. Now, if I had a parachute..."

She laughed. “I couldn’t agree more but Gorilla doesn’t seem to mind much. Nothing seems to faze him. It’s kind of why I crush on him so hard.”

The Professor nodded. “I see what you mean.” They both laughed. Laughter is a musical instrument that everybody can play.

Sarantos had fallen in love with the Greek Islands and took this opportunity to start daydreaming about his house. He’d hired an elderly couple to take care of it while he was gone. They would live on the premises and clean and maintain the garden and pool.

That purchase set him back a bit, so he was glad to find a buyer for The Lady so quickly. He needed the money more than ever, because of his impulsive purchase. It might pay off in the future, though, as he hoped to retire there.

His mind drifted to Texas. He couldn’t wait to party in Texas. The rancher that purchased the artifact had a spread of over 10,000 acres. His cattle ranch was called El Paso, and he’d invited them to stay at his ranch for a week. His name was Lydon Jackson, and he wanted to share his big Texan hospitality with his new associates. Sarantos mind wandered like a teabag without water. What if this doesn’t work? But what if it does?? He was not a guy who had nothing on his mind.

“You know, Charlie, I think I’m going to get me the biggest cowboy hat I can find along with some comfy cowboy boots.” He tried to speak with a Texas accent but wasn’t very successful.

“I think that would suit you, Professor. I’m down for a cowgirl hat. I love riding horses and it’ll be good to be back in the saddle.”

He smiled and concluded that the turbulence wasn’t so bad after all.



The three of them stood in the dry field, by a road about three miles from the airport. The sun was smiling. The dust was swirling because the wind wouldn't sit still.

“Look Doc, a lizard.” The kid seemed to have a golden grip on reality.

“Yeah, kid, you’re going to see them running around everywhere, even on Charlie’s cowgirl hat, once she actually buys one.” He smirked.

Charlie looked down at the lazy lizard and moaned. “It’s hot out here without a hat. Where is the driver? He’s a runnin’ late.” It’s funny how our personalities change depending what state we’re in.

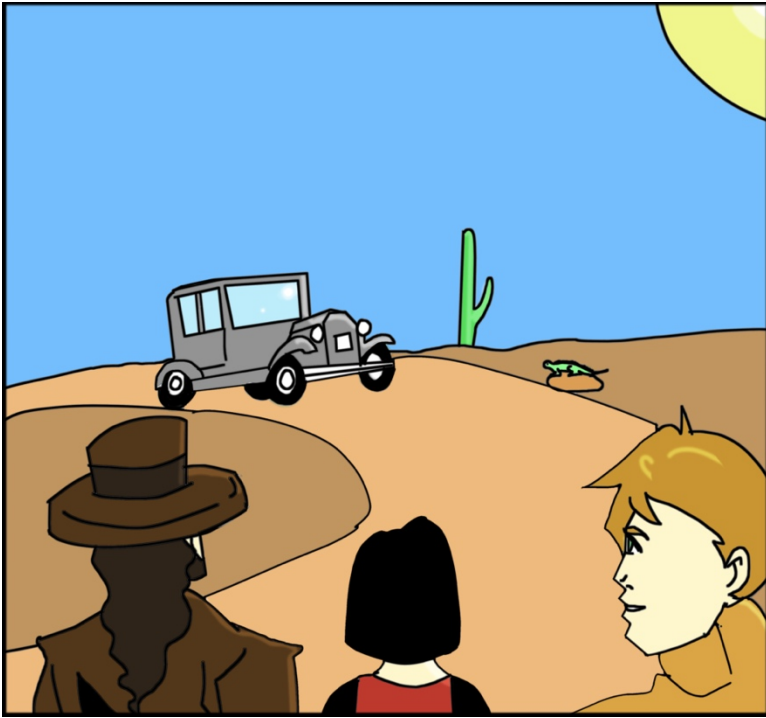
He never liked it when she complained. It happened more often these days. We all have a choice.

“Charlie, keep in mind you’re getting part of the pumpkin pie, so hold your horses and let’s give us a little more cowgirl charm.”

She laughed. “Sorry, you’re right.” The Professor was good at making women comfortable and uncomfortable. It was a special skill he’d perfected after all these years.

“Doc, there’s a car now. Looks like a Ford model A from here.” And the car was racing like a teen being chased by an army of wasps.

“Yeah, kid, I think you’re right.”



As the car drew closer, the Earth continued to rotate back toward the sun. The beige and black car with glistening silver hubcaps pulled directly in front of them, and a tall driver got out of the car and tipped his cowboy hat.

“Howdy, ma’am. I’m Rudy, a rancher at the El Paso.” He turned to him. “Are you Professor Sarantos?”

“Yes,” he said, holding out his hand for a firm handshake.

“I’ll be your driver, to take you back to the ranch.”

Rudy grabbed Charlie’s luggage and put it politely in the back seat, then he helped with theirs.

The heeled boots on Rudy were spurred. He wore new blue jeans and a long-sleeved flannel shirt. Gorilla couldn’t believe it considering the heat.

The kid was smooth as a cucumber. “What the hell are you wearing flannel for? I’d be sweating like a hog.”

The tall cowboy never flinched, hard as they come. He looked directly into the kid’s eyes with steely sky-blue ones of his own.

Rudy’s voice was clear, cutthroat, and in a booming low-tone, he stated. “Young lad, you’ll soon find that out here the sun burns, and burns bad, better to sweat than not be able to move. Once you burn, you’ll peel for a week, sometimes two, and you might smell crass using a salve that comes from a cow’s lard and urine. That’s the most ungodly, unpleasant thing to live with, and believe me, city boy, no one around here will want to be around you. So, if you can, wear the flannel is my advice.”

The cowboy stood straight up while continuing to stare into the kid's eyes, like he waited for a challenge. None came.

“Well, I baked that up. Thanks Rudy, glad to know.”

“Good. Professor, you are in the front with me, and you two young city kids can ride in the rumble seat.”

Neither could've protested even if they wanted to, because the handsome, sun-kissed cowboy held out his arm for Charlie to put her hand through as he led her to the seat and helped her up and in. He was a true gentleman.

Mickey climbed up next to her and never said a word. The Professor knew little that could shut the kid up until this gritty cowboy, who stood head and shoulders taller than both of them, did. He grinned.



The ride back to the ranch was hot even with all the windows open. They spotted a few dust swirls that lifted into the sky like mini tornados. The Texans called them dust devils. Reality left a lot to the imagination. Rather than see any of this as a problem, Charlie saw it as an opportunity. She what would not stop talking. To be heard over the open windows, she was talking so loudly that he doubted she'd be able to speak when they finally got to the ranch.

The drive continued to be monotonous like a Sunday morning sermon. The scenery never changed. This was time he'd never get back. He thanked his lucky stars when the ranch gate appeared after a turn. It was the only thing they'd seen different for miles and miles.

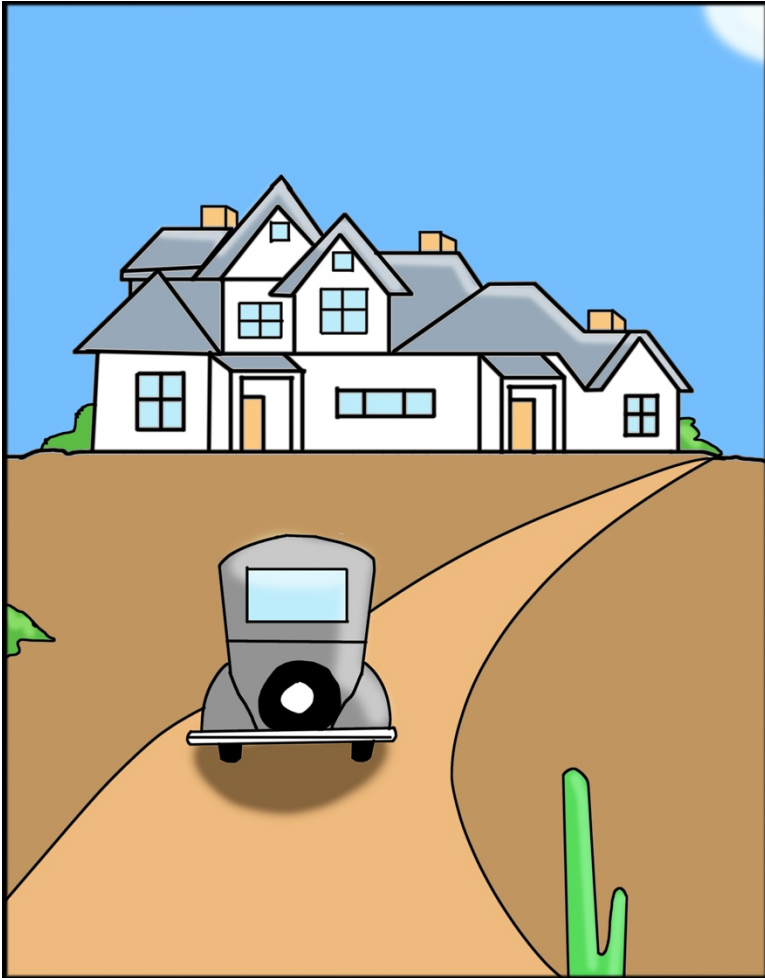
There was a deep ditch that separated the road from the miles of field and small streams that weaved around the boulders, sprinkled with cacti leaping out of the ground with varying shades of green. Still, for the most part the browns ruled. It was obvious the scorching sun dominated the land.

The grand entrance had giant tree trunks to either side, about 30 inches in diameter and a wrought iron gate attached to both sides in the shape of a cabin. Overtop hung a wooden sign carved with cows, cacti, and in the middle, the words El Paso Ranch neatly pressed in large clearly carved letters. To the Professor, people this wealthy were never normal. This seemed like the story of one person's struggle to find their place in an awkward world.

Rudy stopped the car, opened the gate, then drove in. The kid leapt out of his seat and closed the gate before the large cowboy could get out of the vehicle again. You can lay low or stand tall. Rudy tipped his hat, and the kid looked pleased.

There was no sign of the actual ranch until after another 20 minutes of driving when lush green grass and robust, able-bodied trees came into view. The road alternated a few more

times between enormous trees and bright white freshly painted picket fences until finally, the ranch appeared as if by magic.



It was a 2-story ranch with 2 sprawling porches extending completely along the front of the ranch, both on the top and bottom. It was a lively white wood-paneled home with at least 3 chimneys that could be seen from the front road.

The car pulled into a massive six-car garage, that had a workshop to the left of the vehicles that engulfed the entire building.

“Wow.”

The kid was at a loss for words. This was a rare occurrence.

As they walked up to the massive ranch that reached at least five tennis courts in length, Sarantos saw in the distance several other buildings that appeared to be smaller homes for the help. He had read somewhere that 95% of land in Texas is privately owned.

Cowboys were running around everywhere. Some were corralling large cattle into a fenced area; others were riding up to a large barn used for housing horses. A herd barn for the cattle stood next to the fenced pen.

“Hello partners!” A man’s voice bellowed like a bull as the door opened and out walked a giant of a man, dressed in an unusually outrageous outfit for living on a ranch.

“Thank you for inviting us to stay on your ranch for a while. I’m Professor Sarantos. That is Micky, but you can call him Gorilla, and the lovely lady is Charlie.”

“Well, no worries. Rudy, take their bags to the rooms I done showed you. Get Eloise to take them to their rooms and show them around. They might want to dress proper for dinner.” Lyndon tapped the younger Rudy on his back. “Come on in, folks. Texas is big on flavor, and we have the best dining experiences you’ll find anywhere in the world. Always remember, there’s plenty of food waiting for you: steaks, beans, biscuits, dried meat, dried fruit and coffee. And we can barbecue pretty much anything! Now, hurry and get yourselves dressed nicely and we’ll see you all here later.”

The giant ranch owner showed them to the foyer and nodded at a smartly dressed, elderly woman who stood grinning. She looked educated and serious about life.

The rancher went back out the door they’d just come through.

“Welcome, ya, all. I’m Eloise and I’ll show you to your rooms. Please follow me.”



The foyer had an epic primary set of stairs in the middle that led up to a landing before splitting off in two directions. The floors were highly polished wood planks, and the walls followed the scheme of things. It was rustic. Hanging from the ceiling was an antler chandelier.

The three of them followed her up the stairs and then to the right. Dim lighting, antiques, and valuable paintings hung on the walls.

They dropped Charlie off first, then Gorilla, and then she led Sarantos to a large room with a king-sized bed and a roaring fireplace. It was the biggest fireplace he had ever seen.

“The fireplace you may need in the evenings. It gets chilly here at night. I put fresh towels in your bath. It’s through that door. If you need anything, please let me know. I will wait for all of you at the main stairway to show you the dining hall. Be quick, our Baron doesn’t like to be kept waiting. Food is important here.”

She left.

Sarantos hardly had time to think about the massive room. It even had a private writing table. Instead, he went into the bath and cleaned himself up quickly and then immediately put on his best clothes. He was glad he’d brought them. As he exhaled and stared out the window, he realized everything he could ever want is right in front of him. After that thought, he ran out of the room.

He met them all at the top of the stairs.

“Charlie, you look lovely.” There was no doubt heaven was on her side.

“Thanks.” Gorilla was beaming from ear to ear.

Eloise guided them to the planned dining experience. The dining hall was fit for a king’s palace. A large mahogany table graced the center of the room and was burdened with an enormous amount of food.

The kid looked like he’d just walked into a candy store. “Holy hell, this is amazing.”

The big rancher chuckled and said, “My feelings exactly Gorilla. Go big in Texas or go home. We have pecan pie, the best in the country, and you know what they say about that. It goes perfect with love. My gal ought to know.”



A beautiful woman with greying hair pinned to the top of her head waltzed into the room and Lyndon stood, kissed her hand, and then helped her to her chair.

“This is my wife, Gabbie. Isn’t she the most beautiful picture this side of the Rockies?”

The Professor had to admit she was incredibly beautiful, and his head nodded involuntarily, and to his surprise, so did Charlie’s. Whenever a woman thought another woman was

beautiful, that was the true mark of beauty. Women understood what made other women beautiful, and to admit it, meant it was undeniable and there could be no room for jealousy in that situation.

The kid, being the kid, came up with a big Texan answer. “Hell, yeah, she’s the bomb, the cat’s meow.” He blushed instantaneously. “If you don’t mind me saying.”

The big Texan stood behind him and grabbed the kid on both shoulders. “Hell no! Now that’s what I call treating a Texan with Texan hospitality. The man has eyes.” Lyndon squeezed the kid’s shoulders, laughed, and slapped him on the back. The clock didn’t seem to tick.

Charlie wasn’t even jealous, but Gabbie blushed a nice rosy pink that made her look ten years younger than she probably was.

“It’s so nice to meet you. I love your bandana,” said Charlie.

Gabbie’s bandana was a red, white, and blue striped silk scarf. The blue color brought out her bright blue eyes and matched perfectly.

“Damn right you should, if you’re any type of proud American. You are all too kind. I think you folks have made my day.”

The rancher sat down and hollered for someone named Gertie. There was no need for a bell. His voice was more boisterous than an erupting volcano. It echoed through the house. Even the walls seemed to be listening and standing at attention.

No sooner had he bellowed when a small elderly woman ran into the dining hall with four servants trailing behind her. All had more food in their hands and immediately poured out drinks for everyone present. This doesn’t represent what the world looks like.

Dinner was the loudest place he’d ever been at, especially when three men joined them, one being Rudy.

“Rudy, you know the adventurers, but Frankie, and Simon, please meet our guests. The Professor, Gorilla, and the charming Charlie. Rudy is like family to us, been with us since he was a teen. Simon and Frankie are our young boys, but fierce and loyal cowboys. Frankie can land a calf in the time you take to take a swig of the best homemade moonshine.”



They all laughed.

“Simon seems to be the biggest rule breaker on the ranch. But he can lasso anything under a minute; you be careful around him, pretty Charlie.”

Simon looked at her and winked. Charlie giggled.

As soon as they were done eating, the big rancher raised his voice. “Bring on the lone star sweets!”

No sooner had he said it, but pies, cakes, and candies he’d never seen before were whizzed into the room while the used plates were removed and fresh ones took their place, all within minutes. They poured more drinks.

“What say? We have a good old cowboy party Saturday night for our guests. It’ll be the biggest dang party ever. I’m going to call up my good friend Roy Rogers and get the music done right.”



Sarantos couldn't believe his ears. Roy Rogers and maybe Dale Evans right here. The Texans sure knew how to live high on the hog. Texas makes sure you have fun! There's nothing like a party in Texas.