

# The Pasture

By

Virgil Clarke

The noon sky stretches to the horizon, wispy white clouds float across the endless ocean of air. Below, the land is green and mixed with shades of yellow; if you keep looking you can see the rolling hills, the hay, and the sagebrush. The land is rugged filled with its untamed beauty and danger that calls out, grabbing at one's very soul and squeezing until it bursts. That feeling is the spirits of this land whispering their nonsense into the ears of those you will listen. I look up into the sky hearing them.

The sky is beautiful and always is at this time of year. The air is still, not like the wind blasted winters that speak of a frozen hell. Days like this remind me of the first time that grandfather took me out to the forgotten pasture and told me a secret so loaded with responsibility that it made my head spin. My father would later say that it happens to every one when they find out.

Today is a special day though; it is the anniversary of the astonishing event that happened in the pasture, under blue skies surrounded by cattle and yes, if I heard right, two llamas. Grandfather told me that time just seemed to stop, as if it were somehow frozen. He said it didn't last long, but it was the strangest thing seeing it just stop. He said time just needed a break because things were way out of hand. Grandfather declared out loud that day with a fist held up to the sky, in a loud voice, "Rod Sterling, eat your heart out!"

My grandfather was a big fan of 'The Twilight Zone' saying there was more truth in that show than what the government was telling you. It makes me laugh when I think of his logic, he must have had to somehow make reality, or what he knew of reality, fit with this truly unknown experience; or as we who are called the Knowers call, 'The Event'. It sounds all secretive, but hell, there are only about six of us that know, it's a family secret.

When I was told and taken to the pasture to meet our 'neighbors' I was only about eight years old so, in a sense, it was a childhood wonder given life. The few adults that knew had trouble with the whole concept for quite some time, their religious faith as they seen it was fragmented for a while. I think it's hilarious. Grandfather used to laugh at those who thought they knew everything; he knew he had one up on them.

I'm on the four-wheeler pulling a small trailer full of food and drink, with me is my fiancé Nancy, who insisted on bringing several bottles of grandfather's vintage 1955 wine. The year the neighbors arrived. She also wants to put jasmine on grandfather's grave since that was his most treasured flower; he loved the smell. He's buried in the pasture near the neighbor's settlement. Nancy knows the secret; she was grandfather's nurse when he was bed ridden. She is wonderful and understanding about the nature of our responsibility and what we do to keep it a secret.

In the beginning, Nancy thought we where all whacko until she learned the truth. She couldn't believe it, and when she finally met Jasper and his family, she just fainted.

Jasper thought that Nancy's reaction was normal; everyone else seemed to do that when they met him. Since then she and I have decided to build a life together here on the ranch and to carry on grandfather's dream. Mom and grandma love Nancy, they are always saying how grounded and intelligent she is. She's that and a whole lot more. She has been a godsend, helping in anyway she can. Her nursing and medical skills have been invaluable tools; ranch life and injuries seem to go hand in hand.

The women never fail to mention how lucky us guys are to have them around, or else we were liable to do something stupid and get ourselves killed. Grandma always scolded the men when a new idea concerning our neighbors came up, pointing to an incident a few years ago when grandfather built a rocket out in the red desert with Jasper's help. It would have worked too, if it hadn't decided to explode instead. What a mess. Dad and I covered that one up pretty well. I had never seen Jasper's wife get mad, but man did she hit the ceiling when she found out about the 'covert op rocket launch'. Since then, we have been more careful experimenting with rocketry and propulsion, we don't need the feds knocking on our back door asking questions. We're just trying to help Jasper and his family return home.

I come out here twice a week from the house. It's great seeing them, like looking back on my youth. When I look at them I see this strange childlike quality, since they never age. In the past fifty years they have become our family. At first, they felt very alone and frightened, but as the years passed, they adapted, and learned to cope with the environment and us. I hear the first few winters were rough on them. Winter around here can get nasty, so grandfather and dad built a makeshift shelter for them using their wreckage, the crater it left and teepee building techniques of the local tribes for the overall design.

They crafted a house that grandfather said was fit for a king. The dwelling uses some strange battery type power from the wreckage to heat and cool the place. Grandfather and Jasper argued and disagreed over how the system would work, but eventually they designed a heating and cooling system that was far superior to anything else in the world, or so they claimed. Grandfather and Jasper did a lot of projects together; they had actually become fast friends. It was he who pulled Jasper and his pregnant wife from the wreckage. When he died, Jasper suffered a tragic loss, and has since become somewhat withdrawn. The drive to leave has left him; there have been no new projects.

Jasper is very drawn to the religions and ceremonies of the local Indian Tribes, due in part, I'm sure, to some of grandfather's wild stories. The two of them built a sweathouse, claiming it would allow them to become more attuned to the elements. Grandfather would say that not even the natives could build one like this. Jasper spends most of the day in there humming Gregorian chants. He says our religions are inspiring. I think that his home is a lot warmer than here and the sweathouse is a comfortable reminder of that. Either way you look at it, it just comes down to the fact that he misses grandfather.

Dad comes out here to pitch horseshoes and share in the sweathouse's soothing effects. Jasper and him play cards together, usually a mad game of poker.

I press the accelerator, wanting to get there sooner. I want to pitch some shoes. The pasture sits against some rolling hills, on the other side, sagebrush runs rampant and the antelope are numerous. Cattle and llamas roam the pasture, eating the grass that just

seems to keep growing. Nancy loves animals and has a fond place in her heart for those llamas. Jasper claims they're the intelligent ones. Nancy squeezes into me as we race across the plains, empty land that grandfather and dad thankfully would not give up.

The pasture comes into view, it is a patchwork of beauty, but to one side, going towards the middle is a long burrow covered in grass and uprooted rock. At the end of this 'scar' lies a crater covered by earth, neatly camouflaged by another one of grandfather's and Jasper's triumphs; more native tech put to good use.

I see smoke rising in the distance; the sweathouse must be occupied. Nancy smells the sage in the air, "Jasper is in there early today, isn't he? I thought he would be getting ready for the party."

I look at her out of the corner of my eye, "Hell, he's in there all the time, he says he's trying to reach enlightenment." We come down the hill towards the pasture, to our side there is a row of hedges with a path cut between them, a natural wind barrier that grandfather had made. The hedges are tall and have a graceful look to them. I drive through the hedge path and dart across the pasture; Nancy is tugging on my shirt, telling me to slow down, "The kids might be out running around."

I slow down to almost a crawl. She's right, they're always running around. They're wonderful, they don't have the paranoia that their parents or we had at first. They are brilliant, but both still young by their people's standards, even though they were born over thirty-five years ago. Seeing those kids makes me want to share a joy like that with Nancy.

We pass grandfather's headstone and head to the sweat lodge where we see the two children, running around with feather taped to their little bald heads, yelling war cries. I stop the four-wheeler near the sweathouse, the children run towards us wearing paint all over their gray bodies. Nancy jumps off the back and asks in mock amazement, "What are you two doing?"

The two children look at each other and giggle in their strange tones. The first, who has a yellow tuft of hair that hangs at the bottom of her head, is Ala, the girl. Don't ask me how I know; they all look the same. Grandfather said that the females have colored hair at the base of their skull. The other is the Omu, the boy.

Ala looks at Nancy and says in a chirpy soothing tone, "We are practicing for the rain dance, to replenish the earth."

Omu chirps in, "Yeah! Dad says it will help our crops this year."

I can't help but laugh. "What is Jasper filling your heads with now?"

As if on cue Jasper sticks his head out of the sweathouse entrance, grinning. "Watch what you say. Their minds are fragile, you heathen." He steps out of the house; sweat running down him like a river. He walks over and looks up at me with his big yellow bulb like eyes and blinks. "Fifty years ago today your grandfather saved our lives and for that we are grateful for your friendship and your caring." He reaches out and hugs me with his eyes pressed against my chest.

"Ok Jasper lets not make a scene here. Where's your better half?" Jasper points back in the direction of grandfather's headstone. There kneeling in front of the grave is Ulu, Jasper's life long companion. "Nancy, lets go to the headstone. Ulu is already there." Nancy looks up from the children who she has been chattering with, "Where did she come from, I didn't see her?" That's the thing about Jasper's people, their fast and stealthy, especially the children.

Jasper and the rest of us head to the stone. Nancy goes to the four-wheeler and grabs the jasmine and a couple bottles of Grandfather's prized wine. Ulu stands up and waves at us as we arrive. She runs toward Nancy and embraces her. Those two have formed an unbreakable bond. In her own unique tone, Ulu says, "You have made it. I would have greeted you sooner, but I did not want to interrupt your conversation." We all look at each other and then at the stone. It's an uneasy silence; none of us know what to say.

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