

TEX and KATE

By Jackie L. Young

BACKSTORY

Being a big fan of Saturday Afternoon Cowboy Shows (like Roy Rogers and Gene Autry), I approached Roy Rogers' son and asked to write a movie on the legendary Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. Unfortunately, I was turned down. I decided to revive this nostalgic era with this mixed-genre tribute to these Saturday afternoon TV stars with this story. I originally wrote this to star Chris Klein or Brandon Fraser as Tex. On with the action . . .



CHAPTER I



Ponce de León & TV Cowboy Stars

The year is 1513. The location is Western Florida. A machete slashes through thick green foliage, revealing a beautiful hidden oasis in the midst of the lush Florida jungle. Two sweat-drenched Indian slaves step through the clearing and pull the brush aside to allow passage to an entourage of explorers. Don Juan Ponce de León, a Spanish man with a hardened face, steps to the front, awestruck by the sight. His ‘scientist’ on the expedition, Miguel, an older man with white hair and a long beard, moves to his side, takes out a weathered leather-bound notebook, unravels it and sits. Taking out a bottle of ink, Miguel dabs a quill pen and writes. A train of slaves, each loaded with two large clay pots strapped to their backs, enters the area and awaits orders.

In the tranquil pool, gold is scattered throughout the rocks and sparkles through the clear bubbling water. Don Juan steps to the water’s edge and lifts a handful of the gold covered rocks. Water trickles from his hand, the gold residue filling his palm. Miguel bends down and scoops some of the clear water into a silver cup. Don Juan holds the handful of radiant gold out toward the slaves, and orders them in Spanish to fill the containers, “Llenad los receptáculos!”

Miguel, convinced that they have found the Fountain of Youth, conducts an experiment on one of the slaves. He chooses an old, wrinkled man and orders him to drink from the pool. Before their very eyes, he is transformed into a young man. Upon seeing the miracle, Miguel requests that the water be brought back with them immediately.

But, Don Juan's greed for gold prevails Miguel's insistence. "The men cannot be spared. I will return for the water."

"Allow one man to carry one container. Just one," Miguel pleads.

"Very well, I will allow one container. But you must carry the burden."

Miguel agrees.

On the journey out of the jungle, the party becomes aware that a tribe, hostile to the Spanish expedition, has been watching their every move. They hurry to reach safety, but are suddenly attacked. Arrows barrage the expedition and they separate in the confusion. Miguel finds himself lost in the jungle, short of breath and his muscles weak from carrying the container filled with the wondrous water on his back. As he turns to get his bearings, a volley of arrows strikes him. He tries to move, stumbles forward, and is shocked to find that his feet are slowly sinking into a bog. His life slowly slips away as he sinks deeper and deeper until he disappears from sight entirely.

Four hundred and forty years later, in Hollywood, California, a green 1940s Chevy pickup pulling a horse trailer, drives up to a studio gate and stops. The gate guard steps up to the truck and eyes the horse trailer. He leans over and looks in at the occupants of the truck. An attractive couple in their twenties look back at him. He notices their red and white double-breasted western gear and smiles. Kate smiles back politely as Tex Calhoun, her husband, hands the guard a card. The guard takes the card and examines it.

Tex explains, "Fella at the rodeo said to see this producer."

The guard scans the card. "What producer?"

Tex reaches out and flips the card over.

The guard reads it, hands it back, then straightens up. He points. "Make a left, go down to Lot 31. Ask for Mr. Fontaine."

Tex puts the truck in gear and pulls away.

Meanwhile, across town, Frank and Alvin, a couple of bank robbers are making a mad dash out of the LA Savings & Loan Bank. They jump into their car and peel away. Blue smoke rises from the screeching tires.

A fat security guard, still struggling to get his gun out of his holster, stumbles out of the bank just in time to see the car squealing away. The bank president, a skinny man with thick glasses and bow tie, steps to the security guard's side who has just managed to free his gun and take aim. The bank president gives the guard a disgusted look as a police car, lights flashing and siren whining, pulls up to the bank.

Tex and Kate are loading their horses back into the trailer while Mr. Fontaine apologizes for turning them down, "Sorry kids, I don't need another rope and pony show. I need a cowboy star."

On the other side of the studio lot, Frank and Alvin are being pursued by the police and drive through the studio fence. Alvin, the driver, looks back at the cop car in pursuit. When he turns back around, he's confronted with what appears to be an old woman crossing in front of the car. He squeals to a halt. The woman bangs on the hood with her fist and then shakes it at them. The police car comes to a stop behind them and two policemen jump out, guns cocked and aimed.

Frank quickly jumps out, grabs the woman, and puts his gun to her head. "Back off coppers, or the old lady gets it."

The woman looks at Frank offended by the remark. "Old Lady! Look Bub, I'm only twenty four and if you can't tell an actress from the real thing then you must be a real . . ."

"Shut up! God, I hate actors."

Frank moves her to the car and pushes her in while the cops wait for orders to fire. The bank robbers take off, driving around other people on the lot and speed away.

Across the studio lot, Mr. Fontaine, the producer, is admiring Tex's pearl handled guns and is trying to buy them for the prop department. Tex draws them, twirls them, and shoves them back into his holsters. He tells Mr. Fontaine that they're not for sale when the bank robbers speed by with the police in hot pursuit. Tex, Kate, and Mr. Fontaine watch in amazement as the cars race by. The actress hangs out the window and shouts for help. The police car slides out of control and into a building, crashing through the doors. Tex instinctively backs his horse out of the trailer and jumps on. He gallops away after the robbers' car.

Mr. Fontaine watches in amazement. "Where is he going?"

Alvin, and Frank are shocked to see Tex galloping after them. “Who in the hell is that?” Frank asks.

Alvin moves closer to the mirror as if it would help to see clearer. “Maybe it’s John Wayne.”

Frank jerks Alvin away from the mirror and back into his seat then turns and hangs out the window. “You drive. I’ll take care of John Wayne.”

Frank fires, Tex ducks and gallops toward the other side of the car. Frank starts reloading.

Alvin looks around. “You get ’em?”

Frank is becoming irritated. “No I didn’t get ’em.”

The actress leans over the seat, pulling Frank’s hand toward her to prevent him from reloading the gun, and then bites it. Frank screams then backhands her, sailing her into the back. As he leans back out to aim, he can’t locate the cowboy. Believing he has resolved their cowboy problem, he relaxes. “It’s a good thing, he wised up ’cause—”

Alvin spots Tex and interrupts, “Ah, Frank, we got a problem.”

As Frank turns, he sees that Tex is now galloping along Alvin’s side of the car.

Alvin is dumbfounded. “What do I do?”

“Shoot ’em, you idiot!”

Alvin turns to aim his gun but it’s immediately knocked out of his hand by Tex. Frank quickly reloads his gun and leans out his window to fire at Tex over the top of the car. Tex ducks as he fires. Tex’s boot lands on the side of Alvin’s head. He is knocked into a daze. The car veers away and crashes into an old parade float parked outside the building.

Tex quickly dismounts as the actress climbs out and runs away. Alvin is slumped over the steering wheel, his partner, Frank, climbs from the smoldering vehicle and quickly tries to reload his gun. Still fumbling to reload, he slowly looks up, scanning the fancy cowboy boots, the fancy holster and guns, and finally up the double-breasted red shirt, to Tex’s crossed arms.

Tex smiles, his hat cocked back on his head. “Howdy,” Tex says politely through his winning smile.

“Who are you?” Frank asks, his hands shaking as he tries to reload.

“Tex.”

Frank finally gets the bullets in and closes the chamber of the gun. “Figures,” Franks says, moving the gun toward Tex.

Tex lowers his hands to his guns, ready to draw.

Frank notices. “This might be Hollywood, but this is real, buckaroo.”

Tex snatches the gun from Frank’s hand in a flash and cracks him in the head with the gun handle. Frank falls backward as Tex examines Frank’s gun. “So is that . . . Buckaroo.”

The police car finally arrives, spitting and sputtering smoke. The cops jump out and converge on the criminals. One helps the dazed Alvin from the car as the other cuffs Frank.

Kate and Mr. Fontaine arrive. Kate steps to Tex’s side as Mr. Fontaine tries to catch his breath and spit out his admiration. “That . . . was . . . some . . . show . . . kid.”

Mr. Fontaine bends over to get some air and then straightens up. He continues, still slightly out of breath. “We’ve . . . got . . . a slot . . . a Saturday series for a cowboy star. We’ve been looking for an original American hero. I think we’ve found him.” Tex reaches up and strokes his horse’s head. Fontaine notices. “What’s the horse’s name?”

“Rusty,” Tex replies.

The cops pass with the handcuffed robbers in the back and Fontaine overhears one of the cops remark that Tex’s horse is as fast as lightning. He smiles upon hearing it. “Change his name to Lightning and we have a deal.”

Tex puts his hand out to Mr. Fontaine. “You have a deal.”

Fifty years later, we find Tex and Kate living in a cozy little cottage located in the Elderville Retirement Community in Florida. The living room shelves are adorned with eight-by-ten glossy black & white photos that highlight the successful career of TV’s beloved cast of the *Tex & Kate Roundup Show*. In one photo, they are in full cowboy gear standing next to Lightning. The writing across the photo reads, *Lightning with Tex and Kate, 1955*.

Kate is preparing to go do her Saturday morning grocery shopping. Tex is in his usual lawn chair on the small deck, doing what he normally does—nothing.

Tex has become withdrawn from the world and spends the majority of his time silently staring into space. Today, he is watching the neighbor, Flora Night, an ex-burlesque dancer and gaudy dresser, entertain her son, Herald, his wife Bertrise, and their two young children in her backyard.

Tex doesn't hear his wife tell him that she is going shopping nor that reruns of their show are on TV and she has turned to the channel for him to watch.

Later, after Kate has left, sounds of the popular 1950s *Tex & Kate Roundup Show* spill out through the patio screen door and into his ears. That draws his attention. Tex stands and slowly moves into the house. He finds himself standing alone in the middle of the room watching a much younger version of himself, a lifetime ago.

In that particular show, Tex and his sidekick, Happy, played by character actor Les Cooper, a somewhat chubby comedic looking character wearing a turned-up cowboy hat, are investigating a gold mine that has mysteriously started producing gold. All the townsfolk are investing their life savings into the mine. This has Tex, Kate, and Happy concerned. As in every show, Tex does the thinking and Happy says something stupid, which immediately gets him a canned laugh.

As it progresses, Tex and Happy go into the mine to investigate. They immediately discover it's a fake.

Tex lights an old lantern and inspects the mine wall. He rubs the gold with his fingers. It rubs off. "Just like I thought. He's selling fake claims to the townsfolk."

Happy repositions his cowboy hat, "Fool's gold. And nearly the whole town fell for it. That makes me mad, dadgummit!"

As Tex and Happy turn, they come face to face with a man dressed as a prospector . . . Cole Black.

Cole has a gun pointed at them. "By the time they figure it out I'll be in Mexico territory. Drop the gunbelts."

Tex and Happy unbuckle their belts and drop them, as Cole moves closer.

"You're not a prospector. So who are you?" Tex inquires.

Cole reaches up and removes his beard. Happy is startled and recognizes their arch enemy. "Cole Black!"

Tex shakes his head. "I should've guessed you were behind this, Cole."

The black and white images of the TV show progresses on to tell the cowboy tale. To the older Tex, watching the show is a painful reminder of his lost youth. He knows the ending, always the same. Tex, Kate, and Happy get the villain and ride off into the sunset, happily ever after. There is no happy ending like in the movies, not in real life anyway. On that day Tex would prove it.

In the bedroom, a somber and older Tex opens the large double-drawer that contains his cowboy props from the show. Neatly folded on top are his red double-breasted cowboy shirts placed alongside his white cowboy hat. Lifting the clothes, the pearl handled guns and holsters are revealed below. Gently removing one of the pistols and a bullet from its box, he closes the drawer.

On the deck, Tex sits back down into his lawn chair with the gun in his lap. After a shallow breath, he raises the gun to his temple, his shaking finger finding the trigger. Flora's hand intervenes just as the trigger is pulled causing the bullet to miss its intended target. The stray bullet strikes a streetlight at the back of the yard. The light shatters into pieces.

Flora gently removes the gun from Tex's shaking hand, "You should be more careful cleaning your guns, dearie," she tells him, fully aware of his real intentions. As she hands the gun back and turns to depart, she assures him, "Don't worry. I won't say anything to Katie. God knows she worries enough already."

Kate is driving home from the grocery store when she notices a real estate lady removing the 'For Sale' sign from the house across the street. As Kate looks on, she suddenly meets eyes with the new owner, a now much older Ben Carlyle. Startled, she drives over the curb of her driveway while pulling in.

She brings in the groceries.

Tex, who is standing at the window, startles her. "You drove over the curb."

Kate tries to brush it off. "I know."

"Your eyes getting like mine?" he asks.

Kate stops unloading groceries to calm herself.

Tex continues his observation, unaware that it's his old adversary from the show. "Someone bought the Katlin place."

Kate forces herself to act normal. "I know," she admits as she puts away groceries.

Tex slowly approaches her. "Another one joins our little band of misfits here in Elderville," he notes sarcastically, as he puts his hand on her shoulder and squeezes.

Kate reaches into the grocery bag and stops. Everything finally overwhelms her. She weeps. "You sit there watching Flora with her family and I just know you're blaming me and—"

Interrupting, Tex turns her around and wipes her tears away with his aged finger, "It was both of us. Too busy, too consumed by everything. We just let time slip by."

"I would've been a good mother. Wouldn't I have?"

"Yes. You would've been a great mother."

Kate regains her composure and continues unpacking the groceries. "Help me get things ready for the community dinner."

At the community dinner, Tex notices that a man who looks like an older Ben Carlyle is cornering Kate. She scans the room for Tex and sees him already seated at a table staring at her. She tries to act unshaken and goes to him. His eyes follow her as she sits at the table.

"Don't you think that man you were talking to looked a lot like Ben?" Tex asks, his eyes still on Ben.

After a moment of silence, she replies, "It is Ben."

Tex turns to her, stunned. "What's he doing here?"

"He bought the house across the street."

Tex looks almost sick. "He's our neighbor?"

"Yep. If you two want, you can get your guns and have a showdown in the street. Settle it one more time."

"It was settled a long time ago. A lifetime ago."

Flora approaches the table with a plate of food. She sits. She looks up from a bite of food and talks while chewing. "Seems some crazy person shot out that light behind our property. I called the mayor and turns out that the light is so old, they have to replace the whole thing . . . pole and all."

Kate is alarmed. "My God! Someone fired a gun in our neighborhood?" She looks to Tex in shock.

Flora shoots Tex a teasing smile. "You believe that, Tex?"

Tex gives her an evil glance. "Yeah, hard to believe."

Flora continues her torture, "Had to be a pretty good shot, if you ask me."

Tex, becoming uncomfortable, rubs his stomach and says, "You know, Katie, I'm not feeling all that well. Think I'll head home." Tex gives her a peck on the cheek and stands.

"You sure," Kate asks, concerned.

Flora gets one last blow in. "Don't worry, Tex. I'll make sure she don't get attacked by some dentured bachelor on the way home."

Tex gives her a last evil glance before turning to depart. "That makes me feel a whole lot better." He departs as Kate watches him exit.

She turns to Flora. "I'm worried about him, Flora. He sits there all day just staring. It's like he's already—"

Flora interrupts her, putting her hand on her shoulder, "Now take it easy, honey. It's just a phase."

Kate glances out the window at Tex walking home. "Yeah. The final phase."

After the dinner, Flora tries to get Kate to join her and her visiting family for a drive downtown. Kate declines, concerned about Tex.

While walking home, Kate is approached by Ben. "Looks like we're all that's left. It's just you and me, like old times." Kate turns and walks away. Ben catches up.

"There is no you and me. Never was or will be," she replies while stepping briskly toward home.

"That's not the way I remember it."

She stops and spins around. "That was a mistake. One night fifty years ago doesn't make it a you and me." She starts walking again. Ben doesn't follow.

He knows her weakness. "I wonder what Tex would do?"

She stops, looks down, then turns and walks back. She looks up at Ben. "My God. You'd do that to him?"

“I don’t have to. I’d rather not, but that’s up to you.” She slaps him. Rather than experiencing pain, he appears to almost savor it. “God, I’ve missed that slap.”

She had slapped Ben several times before in another lifetime, on and off the set, for his advances. Tex had never known. Kate shakes her head in disgust, then turns to leave. He pursues her. “It’s only companionship. A few minutes of your time, that’s all.” She ignores him as they approach his house. He stops to turn off. “You never answered. What do you think he’ll do?”

She stops, knowing that it would kill Tex to discover that she was unfaithful. Slowly she turns around and walks to him. The bottom line was that in exchange for what Ben called ‘companionship’, he would keep their secret. She lets out a sigh. “A few minutes.”

Ben smiles as he walks her toward his house.

When she enters her house that night, Tex is waiting silently in the dark, having seen her enter Ben’s house then exit an hour later.

“I saw you go into his house,” Tex says in a calm and low voice from the darkness.

Kate puts her purse down and turns on the lamp beside the recliner where Tex is seated. She cannot look into his eyes for what she is about to say was too painful. She kneels beside the chair, her eyes toward the floor, and begins. “You’ve always been the only man for me. I can’t remember ever feeling for another man what I’ve felt for you.” She hesitates. “That’s what makes this so hard.” Tears form in her eyes.

Tex knows what’s coming and tries to stand. “I don’t want to hear it.”

She pulls him back down into the chair and tries to continue through her tears, “We’ve been together forever. You deserve to know.” He tries to stand. She pulls on his pant leg.

“Please, don’t,” he pleads, as he tries to pry her hand from his pant leg.

“If you love me, you’ll listen,” Kate urges. He hesitates, then sits. Kate looks down, ashamed, then delivers the final blow. “After the second season celebration party, I spent the night with Ben.” Tex closes his eyes to shield the pain as she tries to explain. “We’d had a fight and I was mad as hell at you.”

Tex stands, walks out of the room, and out onto the deck. The patio door closes. Kate drops her head and apologizes to an empty room, "I'm sorry . . . I love you."

The next day, Kate, with suitcase in hand, exits the house and stops on the deck. She is so ashamed she can't look him in the eyes. "Flora's family is leaving in the morning. She said that I could stay with her a while. If you want a divorce, I'll understand. I'm sorry, Tex." She walks down the steps, then stops. "I'm taking the bullets with me so you don't shoot out any more streetlights."

She walks away. Tex sits silently in his lawn chair on the deck with his hands clasped together. Then he puts them to his face as his wife of fifty years walks out of his life.

At Flora's, Kate breaks down crying, her emotions a mix of regret and frustration with Tex. Later that night during their heart-to-heart conversation about men in general, they realize that Tex could use a friend to confide in. The problem was that Tex hasn't had a friend since Les Cooper. So they decide to search for him. They call every retired actor's home in Los Angeles and finally locate him.

The lady attendant at the retirement home is not very cooperative. "I'm sorry ma'am but it is past visiting hours and—" she snidely begins.

Flora grabs the phone from Kate and interrupts, "Now listen here, sugar, you get that man on the phone, or I'm gonna fly out there and make it my personal duty to make your life a livin' hell. You got it!" She hands the phone back to Kate. She stares at her for a moment then takes the phone.

The attendant decides to cooperate. "I'll get him. But you'd better keep it short."

Shortly, an old voice from the past answers, "Yes, hello. This is Les."

"Happy?" Kate nervously asks.

He pauses, then answers, "This is Les Cooper."

"This is Kate Calhoun."

"Well, I'll be. How are you?" he joyfully asks.

Kate starts to tear up, "I'm fine. It's so good to hear your voice again. We've missed you." Kate turns away from Flora, almost

embarrassed to ask, “Could you know, do that line? Remember how it goes, ‘That makes me mad, dadgummit!’ Remember?” The end of the phone is silent as her tears start to flow, “That was Tex’s favorite line. Could you just say ‘Dadgummit’? Please.”

Then Happy finally answers solemnly, “I’m not an actor anymore. Kate, are you okay?”

Kate wipes her eyes. “He’s not so good. He needs you Happy.”

He pauses again. “I’m sorry to hear that. But there is no more Happy. Just me, that’s all.”

Kate is unsettled by his denial. She regains her composure.

He continues, “Well, I should go. She’s giving me funny looks.”

“Wait! Let me give you our address, just in case,” she adds.

Happy unwillingly accepts it. “Well, okay.”

In the Old Actor’s Retirement home in LA, a very old Les Cooper scribbles on a piece of paper as an old hag of an attendant watches over him. He hangs up the phone.

Early the next morning, a loud clattering and banging awakens the quiet and peaceful community. The old light pole is being removed and the construction crew proceeds to auger a hole for the new one. Deep down into the ground they dig. The drill penetrates the ground through layer after layer until it comes upon the skeleton of Miguel, arrows still protruding from his body and the container still strapped to his back. The drill penetrates the skeleton and container, breaking it open. Water gushes from the broken container and disperses through the ground. It seeps several feet down the hill until it settles in Tex and Kate’s garden. The water surrounds the roots of the plants and is absorbed.

Two days later, Tex steps out onto his deck and admires the new aluminum light pole. He then realizes that his backyard is full of neighbors who have collected around his garden. Tex fights his way through the crowd to see what’s going on. He finally breaks through and the wonder is revealed. His once modest looking garden is now a virtual paradise. The garden now has brilliant green, red, and yellow plants ten times the normal size. Tex is at a loss for words.

Flora fights the crowd to pull Kate through. They both stop when they see the garden paradise. Flora bursts out, “My God, what’s happened to your garden, Katie? I’ve never seen anything like it.”

Kate steps forward and touches a large tomato. "I don't know." She looks back at Tex. Everyone turns around to look at Tex.

He shrugs his shoulders. "I didn't touch it."

"Well, there are more vegetables here than two people need, so everyone help themselves," Tex announces.

The crowd rushes in and begins picking. Tex is bumped out of the way, and finally just steps aside. Tex finds a large red tomato someone dropped and rinses it off with the garden hose.

Soon, the elderly citizens are departing with armloads of vegetables, except Pete Floyd, a retired minor league baseball player wearing an old worn out Yankees baseball cap, who hates vegetables.

Tex sees him walking away empty handed. "Pete?"

Pete stops. Tex approaches. "You aren't taking some?" he asks, taking a bite of the large juicy tomato.

Pete cringes. "I hate veggies."

Pete walks toward his house. Tex finishes his tomato as he watches Flora and Kate approach with an armful of vegetables on their way back to Flora's.

Kate glances at him, then looks down. "Should I invite him over for dinner?" she asks Flora in a hushed voice.

Flora rolls her eyes and pushes Kate toward the house. "Give him time to sort this out, sugar."

As they pass Tex, he awkwardly watches them walk by. Flora shoots him a taunting smile. He tries to smile, but there is something about Flora that just irritates him. He starts to go after Kate, then stops and turns to go into the house.



CHAPTER II
Young Again & Shopping

Another supposed normal day in retirement paradise begins. Tex rises from his bed and drags himself into the bathroom.

With his eyes half closed, he begins his morning ritual. He removes his dentures from a glass where they had been soaking through the night and starts to shove them in but finds resistance. His mouth is full of teeth. Startled and confused, he straightens in front of the mirror to examine his mouth. Looking back at him in the mirror is a young Tex in his twenties. He instantly ducks down, alarmed. Slowly, he rises and examines his youthful face. Curious, he touches his face. Quickly turning on the cold water full blast, he splashes water on it. He stares down at the sink, his face dripping with water. “Okay, this is one strange dream. I’m gonna wake up now.”

He stands and finds that he’s still young. Laughing, he turns and walks out of the bathroom.

As he steps out onto the deck, he’s amazed to find that all of his neighbors are also out on their decks . . . also young. They’re as shocked as he is and are all checking each other out. He spins around to come face-to-face with the now young and beautiful Kate standing with Flora on her deck. Her mouth gapes open at the sight of her handsome and youthful Tex. Her eyes roll back as she begins to faint. Flora helps steady her and shakes her head.

“Get it together, honey.”

Tex steps forward, not believing what is happening. He shouts to Flora, “I’m having this crazy dream that we’re all young again!”

Flora gets Kate to her feet and yells back, “It’s not a dream, sugar. We are young again!”

Flora spins around and waves her arms at the other residents. “Look at everybody. We’re all young!”

Tex examines all of the neighbors. She’s right. Well, except for poor Pete, who’s still an old man and quite shocked by the sight. Tex’s smile disappears as he notes that Pete is unchanged. Tex starts to say

something to him, but he quickly scurries into his house and closes the blinds.

Later, in Flora's crowded living room, all the neighbors, and even old Pete, are congregated. Flora is in the middle of the room with her arms raised trying to calm everyone down to no avail. Finally, she puts her fingers to her lips and lets out a whistle. Everyone stops talking.

"Now listen up. It looks like we're not all young again. Just some of us."

She looks to Pete. He's eyeing everyone in the room as if he doesn't know them. Just then, Tex enters wearing one of his old western costumes, a double-breasted red shirt, tight blue jeans, and boots. Everyone in the room verbalizes with delight, "Aaaah." Kate stands up, at a loss for words, almost flush. Flora turns to see him.

Tex feeling compelled to explain says shyly, "Nothing fits. Except these."

Overcome by her husband's youthful appearance, Kate starts to wobble and fall. As she starts to pass out, Tex dashes to her and catches her. Placing her in a chair, he runs to the kitchen and gets a glass of water. Returning, he sprinkles some on her face, then puts it to her lips to sip. She comes around. Pete is seated next to Kate and is staring at Tex.

He notices Pete staring. "Hi Pete."

"Who are you?" Pete asks.

"You know me. It's me, Tex."

Pete screams and runs out of the house. Tex looks back at Flora. She shakes her head. "That's what's gonna happen when others see that we're young again."

One of the other neighbors, Betty, who is now young but still wearing her baggy flowered dress, stands. "I think we're having a group hallucination. Someone put drugs in our water."

Flora raises one brow. "Betty, shut up and sit down."

Betty reluctantly sits. Her husband Alvin speaks up, "Maybe we're in an alien ship and it's some kind of experiment."

Everyone is dumbfounded by the insane remark. Flora gives him a stern look. Alvin sits back down. "I know, shut up and sit down."

Mabel, a black woman, and her husband, George, are sitting together. Mabel raises her hand. Flora acknowledges her. “Yeah, Mabel, what is it?”

“If we really are young again. Do I still get my social security checks?” she asks, concerned. Her husband nods in agreement.

Suddenly a rash of discussions breaks out among the group. Flora has to whistle again to get their attention. “You worked for it, and as far as the state of Florida is concerned, you have it coming. It ain’t your fault you’re young again and can actually enjoy your retirement income.”

Everyone laughs. Flora continues, “But! Listen folks. We have to keep this quiet.”

Tex interrupts, “You’re forgetting something Flora . . .”

Everyone stops chattering to listen.

Tex continues, “Sunday nights you have your little crafting parties.”

Flora nods, biting her lip as she thinks. “You’re right. We can’t go there. Besides, we ladies need new wardrobes.”

The women all scream in delight.

Flora urges them on, “So get your credit cards and lets go!”

The women spring from their seats, dragging their husbands along with them. Tex is left standing in the doorway, arms crossed, shaking his head.

Kate can’t help but approach him. “I never ever expected to see you wearing that again.”

Tex tries to smile. “Me either.”

Kate moves closer, longing for a kiss. Tex moves back. “I’m sorry, Kate. I’m just a little confused right now.”

Flora approaches and attacks. “Well, you’d better get un-confused real fast mister. In case you haven’t noticed, she’s no bag of bones. Stay confused too long and she just might not be around.”

Kate is speechless and turns to Flora. Tex moves away from the wall. “I see. I didn’t know.”

Kate looks at Tex, then Flora, then Tex, and then Flora again. She fumbles for words, “I, ah—”

Flora takes over again, “Well, now you do.”

“So that’s the way it is?” Tex replies as he turns to leave.

Kate is still trying to get out some words. “I, ah ... she ...”

Tex steps to the door, opens it, and turns. He gives Kate one last glance. “Looks like we both have some thinking to do.”

As the door closes, Kate grabs Flora and pulls her forward, and talks through clenched teeth, “What are you doing?”

Flora unfurls each of Kate’s fingers, which are clasped firmly on her clothes, and tries to calm her. “Easy, honey. I know men and you’re making this too easy.”

Kate, with her teeth still clenched, replies, “I’m not making it anything. You are!”

Ben Carlyle, with binoculars in hand, watches the strange events that have been playing out in the neighborhood from his living room window. He observes a young Tex stroll back to his house from Flora’s. Dropping the binoculars, he rubs his eyes. “It can’t be.”

A group of young women, including Kate, climb into Flora’s car to go shopping. Ben raises the binoculars just as the car drives by his house. Adjusting the focus, he sees that Kate is young too. “Kate?” He throws the binoculars into the chair and heads for the door.

Running after the car, he shouts, “Kate!”

The car disappears. He turns to go back inside, stops, and looks toward Tex and Kate’s house. The curtains move as if someone had been watching him.

He takes a step back toward his house and mumbles to himself, “Something strange is going on around here. I’m going to find out what it is.” He storms inside.

Something weird was happening in the downtown district. Kate, Flora, her friend Mabel, and several others from the retirement community were wandering the streets gawking like teenagers at the new fashions. This by itself would probably not draw much attention, except they were still wearing their old people clothes which were not only out of style, but were so ill fitting that they practically swam in them. People were stopping whatever they were doing to stare at these very odd women. The group quickly disappeared into the nearest clothing store.

Flora, who used to be what she called an “exotic dancer”, goes right to the provocative, skimpy clothes section, while the other women

converge on the more conservative clothes section. The women and the amount of clothes they are piling on the counter bewilder Jenny, a young salesgirl. Kate, the first up to pay her bill, uses her credit card as she normally does. Jenny processes it then asks for an ID. Kate doesn't think anything of providing one.

Jenny starts to take down the information, then stops, picks up the card, and compares it to Kate's face. She hands it back. "This must be your grandmother's. Could I see yours?"

All of the women from the retirement community burst out laughing. Jenny doesn't get it.

Flora takes the card and hands it back. "That is her, sugar."

Jenny takes the card and studies it again. She looks at the birth date on the card and then rolls her eyes up, trying to do the math. Her eyes roll back down to look at Kate. Her mouth drops. "But that would make you . . . eighty."

Flora leans in and whispers, "Honey, I'm eighty three. I boogied with George Burns when he was a kid."

Jenny moves close to Flora to examine her face. Then she jerks back to reality, unconvinced. "No friggen way."

Flora leans in to Jenny again. "Honey, they have beauty secrets in Sweden that people here don't even know about."

Jenny, still not convinced, leaves to get the manager. She returns with the manager, Erica, who is in her fifties. Erica checks the ID then looks at Kate, and is stunned by her youthfulness. She leans forward and compares the ID to Kate's face. "Ma'am, there is no possible way on earth that you are this person."

Flora steps in, "Not only is she that person, she happens to be a celebrity." Kate nudges her to stop, but Flora continues, "You don't know who Kate Calhoun is?"

Erica stares at Kate's face trying to place her.

Flora shakes her head and continues, "Kids . . . the Tex and Kate Roundup Show. Remember?"

Suddenly, Erica's eyes light up and she blurts out. "Oh, my God! I used to watch your show when I was . . ." It's starting to sink in on Erica that she looks the same, "a . . . little . . ." She stops when the realization hits her. "Wow! You look great!"

Erica motions Jenny to process the sale.

After the girls have paid for their new clothes and are leaving the store with their packages, Erica smiles a big smile and waves. Out of the side of her mouth, she says to Jenny, “How does she do it?”

“They said they had it done in Sweden.”

Erica takes out her cell phone and dials. “Hi Monica. How’s business? Mmmm. How fast can you book me on a flight to Sweden?”

Jenny, standing next to Erica, is listening in. Erica covers the cell phone and shoos her away.

Tex is in his kitchen trying to find room in the refrigerator for the abundance of vegetables from the garden. The refrigerator is packed full, but he forces more in and quickly closes the door before any can fall out. Standing at the door and finds himself at eye level with a photo of their horse, Lightning. Removing the magnet, he lifts the photo and studies it, old memories washing across him. Shoving it into his pocket, he grabs the car keys from the top of the fridge and dashes to the garage.

He steps into the garage and flips the light on. The car he once drove is now covered with a tarp. His eyesight had gotten so bad he could no longer drive. He smiles as he pulls off the tarp revealing a vintage silver 1968 Mustang Fastback.

At the edge of town, Tex speeds along in his Mustang until he approaches a sign that reads *George’s Horse Farm*. He downshifts the Mustang and turns into the long drive.

George, the caretaker, who is wearing an old sweat-stained cowboy hat is closing the doors to a large red barn as Tex drives up and parks. He springs from the car and runs to meet George, who is carrying a bucket and brush.

George is startled when he turns to see someone standing behind him. “Oh, sorry. I was just leaving, sir.” He proceeds on a course around Tex.

Tex calls after him, “You still caring for Tex Calhoun’s horse?”

George stops and slowly turns to face him. He puts the bucket down, admiring Tex’s western clothes. “Sure am.” He smiles, as he looks Tex over, then turns back toward the barn. “Follow me.”

George unlocks the barn and leads him in past several other horses until finally reaching a beautiful white stallion. George leans on

the rail and pets the horse. Tex approaches slowly and is awed by Lightning's beauty.

"Ain't he a beauty?" George asks. Tex reaches out and touches the horse. Lightning turns to Tex like he's familiar. George smiles and continues, "My father cared for the original Lightning. This is his fourth generation; Lightning the fourth. It's a shame. Mr. Calhoun never comes to visit. Not like his wife."

"His wife?" Tex asks, stunned by the revelation.

"She stops by regularly. Been stopping more and more lately," George adds.

"I see."

George looks Tex over curiously, then shakes his head. "Man, anyone ever tell you that you've got a striking resemblance to Tex. You must be related."

Tex laughs. "You could say that."

George removes a bridle from the wall and puts it on Lightning.

"What are you doing?" Tex asks nervously.

"You're not gonna come all the way down here at this time of the evening and not take him for a ride, are ya? I think Lightning might be disappointed."

Tex chokes back emotions. "That would . . . be something."

Tex leads Lightning out of the barn as George stops to get something. Tex clears the barn then notices that George is gone. Before he can turn around, George reappears and throws a blanket and saddle on the horse. "You may need these."

The initials TC are engraved in fancy letters on the saddle. Tex reaches out and caresses the engraved letters as George cinches up the saddle then steps back. Tex mounts Lightning like he had never been gone. Tex pulls back the reins forcing Lightning up on his back legs. A huge beaming smile breaks across George's face. Tex pulls on the reins again and prances Lightning backwards, drops him back down and gallops away into the night. George takes off his hat and throws it into the air. "Hot damn!"

Flora, Kate, and the girls are headed down the road on the way back from town. They pass the pasture where Tex is taking Lightning for a ride. Kate is unaware that Tex is galloping across the pasture parallel with the car until Mabel taps her on the shoulder and points out

the window. Flora sees Tex and instinctively lets off the gas. They slow down and are all captivated by Tex and Lightning. He sees them driving by as he gallops along.

The girls hang out the windows, screaming and waving at Tex. Kate pulls back the sunroof, stands up, and waves at Tex. He pulls Lightning to a halt and rears him up in the air, Lightning's front legs kick. The girls are witnesses to a magical moment in time. Tex spins Lightning around, has him prance, then urges him to take off to a full gallop.

The girls scream in delight.

Flora yanks Kate back down into her seat. "Honey, you got it bad." Then she floors it and the car speeds away.

Tex arrives back at the horse farm, where George meets him and takes the reins as he dismounts. Tex pats George on the shoulder and starts to walk away, then stops. Without turning, he whistles for Lightning. Lightning prances up to his side. Tex strokes Lightning's face and looks back at George. "You taught him?"

"I wanted him ready for Tex when he came back."

Tex walks toward his car. "Thanks, George."

"You're very welcome . . . Tex."

Tex smiles as he climbs into his car and drives away.

On the way home, Tex comes upon Pete carrying a bag of groceries. Tex stops and offers him a ride. Although reluctant to ride with the young Tex, he is finally coaxed into the car.

At Pete's house, Tex helps him put away groceries. Pete, occasionally glancing at the youthful Tex, removes a TV dinner from its box and puts it in the microwave. He looks at Tex and warily asks,

"You gonna make me young too? 'Cause I'm not sure—"

"No. We don't even know how it happened."

As Pete sets his silverware out and pours a glass of milk, Tex checks out all Pete's trophies and pictures which catalog a successful career starting at a very young age and up through college. Tex picks up a very old, tiny glove and examines it.

Pete notices. "Other babies had blankets, I had my glove. It's all I ever knew. I was good. Anyway, that's what folks said."

Tex puts it down as the microwave beeps. Pete takes out the TV dinner and unwraps it. Putting it on the placemat, he sits.

Tex pulls out a chair from the table and sits. “So what happened?”

Pete methodically scoops the vegetables out of the dinner tray and puts them on a napkin, until nothing remains except the meatloaf and gravy. Tex watches and waits.

Pete takes a bite and in mid-chew says, “I started betting, then got into a shark for a lot of green. I didn’t know what else to do.” He swallows, then takes a gulp of milk and continues, “He said if I threw the game, he would take care of me.” He gently places his glass down, reflecting, “I was a stupid kid.”

“Then you did it?” Tex asks.

“Yeah. They found out and that was the end of that.”

Pete picks up the napkins of vegetables and carries them to the trash. “What are you gonna do now that you’re young again?”

Tex watches Pete get rid of the veggies. “I don’t know. I’d like a family.”

“That’s what Kate wants?”

“I don’t know what she wants now.”

“Well, if I was young, I’d play ball and I’d be the best ever.”

“I bet you would.”

Tex stands to leave and looks at the vegetables in the trash. It meant something and he knew it. The connection was clear.

“You never eat vegetables, do you?”

Pete takes a bite of his meatloaf. “I hate ’em.”

A smile creeps across Tex’s face. He rushes toward the door. “Thanks, Pete.”

Tex races out of Pete’s house toward Flora’s with a possible answer for the regained youth that they were experiencing. He has no idea Ben has been secretly watching through the kitchen window.

Flora called for a meeting that night for all those affected. The mob, gathered in her living room, chattered loudly. Once again, Flora’s ear shattering whistle brings the noise to a halt. “Tex is right. The vegetables would explain why we are young and Pete is not.”

Everyone agrees as Flora paces in front of the crowd, contemplating how to prove the theory.

“We need someone to test it on, a guinea pig.”

Just as the words leave Flora's mouth, the doorbell rings. Everyone in the room looks at the door, then her. Flora steps to the front door and opens it, revealing Mayor Howard, who is in his sixties, and not very bright. She opens the door wide for the others to see, then turns to them and smiles. They all nod their approval.

Howard is put off by Flora's youthful appearance. "Flora, did you change your hair?"

Everyone in the room laughs.

Howard looks around, then continues, "Lose weight?"

They all laugh again, including Flora. She moves closer to Howard. He sees that she is much younger.

Almost afraid to ask, he continues, "You look, . . . younger . . . a lot—"

Then he starts to back out, almost in fear of what may be going on inside the house.

Flora grabs him and jerks him into the house before he can escape and slams the door. Poor Howard is still trying to figure out what's going on as the others in the room converge on him.

Howard sits in a chair in the middle of the room with his hands and feet bound. Kate returns from the kitchen with a plate of vegetables. Howard's eyes nervously dart around the room. "Is this one of those occult things?" he asks as Flora approaches. "I want to keep my soul. I'm a Christian, you know."

Flora laughs as she puts the vegetable plate down. "Howard, we don't want your soul. We just want you to eat some vegetables. That's all."

This strikes Howard as strange, then it hits him. "Vegetables? Oh, my God! You're poisoning me!" Howard eyes the vegetables. "Okay. Look, I'll put the money back I took from the community fund. I was only borrowing it."

Flora puts her hand on her hip, not immediately realizing what was just said. "Howard, we're not poisoning you—" Then it hits her. "You're stealing from our fund?" Shocked, Flora looks at the others for their reaction. They shrug their shoulders. There are obviously more important tasks at hand. "We'll deal with that later. Right now . . . eat!"

Howard shakes his head.

Tex and the others approach and surround Howard. He starts to yell for help but is muffled out.

Later, Ben, who has been watching everything through Flora's window, is impatiently waiting for the results from the mayor's involuntary ingestion of vegetables.

Something begins to happen to the mayor. Howard's head jerks back and he moans. The skin on his face tightens as his hairline begins filling back in. His dentures suddenly pop out of his mouth and land on the floor. His new teeth coming in make a bone-crunching noise. After the transformation is complete, Flora unties him and steps back.

Howard tries to focus on the skin tightening up on his hands. He removes his glasses, realizing his sight has also come back. He tosses them, then grins at the others in the room. They break into applause. He stands touching his missing beer belly.

Outside, Ben turns, falling against the house, amazed at what he had just witnessed. He quickly slips away unseen.

Inside, Howard dances around the room in celebration of his new youthfulness. He grabs Flora and swings her around to imaginary music. Soon everyone joins in the dancing.

Kate looks at Tex, longing to be back in his arms. He looks down, and walks away.

Meanwhile, in the garden, Ben is collecting vegetables. With a heaping armful, he scans the area and runs toward his house.

The mayor's wife, Ellen, wearing very thick glasses, answers a knock at her door.

Ben, who is still old, stands in the doorway. "I'm looking for the mayor?"

Ellen, looks around for Howard, and then leans toward Ben. "He's in but not feeling well."

"I see."

She points to her head. "He thinks he's young again. Just humor him." She steps aside and lets Ben enter.

Ben enters the mayor's study. Howard is sitting at his desk with his feet up, inspecting his new youthful face with a hand mirror. He's

alarmed by Ben's presence and quickly puts the mirror away in the desk. Ben approaches and sits on the edge of the desk.

"It's quite amazing. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't witnessed it myself."

"What?" Howard asks as if nothing ever happened.

"Oh come on, Howard. I was there, outside the window. I saw it. I saw you change from a balding, nearsighted, flabby old man," Howard shows his discomfort with this description, as Ben continues, "to . . . well, what you are now . . . young." He steps to the bookshelf and scans the books. He's not impressed by the Nancy Drew series. He shakes his head and laughs. "Right now, we need to be organized. This is too big to be done haphazardly. Don't you agree?"

Howard contemplates Ben's question. "Sure. I guess."

Ben removes one of the Nancy Drew books and thumbs through it. "So, Howard, who actually runs this place? I take it that it isn't you?"

"Nathaniel Garvey. He owns everything," Howard reluctantly admits.

Ben closes the book and puts it back. "So where can I find Mr. Garvey?"

A manservant leads Ben and Howard into the study at Garvey's mansion. They sit and wait as the servant leaves. He returns, pushing a very old, wheelchair bound Nathaniel Garvey. Howard and Ben stand as he is pushed behind his desk. The servant leaves as his boss repositions himself behind the desk. Garvey seems agitated by the intrusion.

"I hope this is a matter of life and death, Howard. I've got no time for dribble and chit chat."

Howard, the meek and timid man that he is, apprehensively approaches Garvey. "This is Ben Carlyle, one of our residents. He wants to talk with you."

Ben approaches as Garvey looks at Howard, noticing that there's something odd about him.

"So you finally got a toupee. Eh, Howard? Well, it looks horrible. Now go. No need for you to hang around eavesdropping on affairs that don't concern you."

Howard exits as Ben approaches closer to Mr. Garvey. "Mr. Garvey, are you a betting man?"

Garvey looks him over, trying to figure his angle. "I've made a bet or two. Why?"

"What if I told you that I could turn the clock back fifty years right in front of your eyes?"

"I don't follow. What's the point?"

Ben removes a plastic bottle of vegetable juice from his pocket. "I'll bet you ten thousand dollars that I can become fifty years younger right here, right now."

Garvey laughs. "You're a crackpot. Get out." He turns his wheelchair around and starts wheeling himself toward the door.

Ben removes his checkbook and tosses it. "I can cover the bet. Can you?"

The checkbook lands on the floor in front of Garvey. He leans over and picks it up. He studies it, then turns around, and wheels to the desk. He opens a safe underneath and throws a bundle of money on top of the desk. "You may be a crazy fool, but you have my attention. Proceed."

Ben uncaps the bottle of juice and drinks it. He recaps the empty bottle and puts it on the desk.

Suddenly, Ben grabs his face, shudders and moans. Collapsing to his knees, he bends over in pain.

Garvey quickly wheels around to the other side of his desk, to ensure no trick is being pulled. Ben's dentures drop out of his mouth and onto the floor. He continues to moan while Garvey wheels over to the dentures and picks them up. He examines them as Ben straightens then stands upright. Garvey is stunned by Ben's appearance. Dropping the dentures, he wheels back, startled. Then realizing what has actually happened, he moves slowly to inspect the changed Ben. Reaching up, Garvey grabs one of Ben's hands and pulls it to him, closely inspecting it.

He slowly looks up at the youthful Ben. "So Howard wasn't wearing a toupee?"

Ben shakes his head.

Later, in Garvey's study, Ben fans his winnings, then takes another container of the juice and sets it on the desk in front of Garvey.

Garvey eyes the container with desire. “How many others know about this?”

“A handful.”

As Garvey reaches for the container, Ben intercepts his hand. “We haven’t made a deal yet.” He then lets go of his hand.

Garvey drops his hand to the desk. “What do you want?”

“I want what I came here for . . . Kate Calhoun.”

“She’s one of them?”

Ben nods. “And a little something to start over with.”

Garvey eyes the container as they continue. “How much?”

“Hundred thousand.”

“Okay.”

Ben slowly pushes the bottle to him with his finger.

Garvey takes the bottle with anticipation, handling it as if it were a newborn, then looks up at Ben.

“There’s the issue of Tex Calhoun. He could be a problem,” Ben adds as Garvey turns his attention to the bottle, unscrews the cap, and sniffs the contents.

“Don’t worry, I can take care of Mr. Calhoun. I know the right people.” Then Garvey looks up at Ben as if he’s intruding. Gently putting the bottle down, he wheels around and opens the safe. He rolls back around and throws five bundles of money on the desk. “That’s all I have on hand. I’ll make arrangements for the rest tomorrow.”

As Ben gathers up the money, Garvey slams his hand down on top of Ben’s. “And then you’ll tell me where this came from . . . right?” Ben looks at the old wrinkled hand with the large brown age spots, then up at Garvey. “Sure.”

Garvey then releases his hand. Ben gathers up the money and leaves. Garvey drinks the juice and puts the bottle down. Picking up the phone, he dials and waits. “Louie, how’s the weather in Miami?”

The voice at the other end responds with a New York accent, “Fine. What can I do for you, Nate?”

Garvey rolls the bottle in his fingers, as he cringes with some minor pain from the concoction beginning its work. “I have a situation here. But nothing a few of your men can’t handle.”

Louie, on the other end, considers the proposition then asks, “What’s in it for me?”

“Money. More money than you can imagine.”

“Consider it done, Nate.”

Garvey hangs up the phone and doubles over in pain.



CHAPTER III
Margaritas & Garvey's Thugs

At Flora's house, piles of beautiful vegetables from Tex and Kate's garden are stacked on the kitchen counter. Flora is cutting up the harvest while Kate packages them up. She finishes filling up a bag and walks to the refrigerator. The freezer is packed full but she still tries to force one more bag in as the other bags roll out onto the floor. Frustrated she throws the bag at the refrigerator.

Flora notes her frustration. "A little stressed?"

Kate picks up the bags on the floor and gently stuffs them back in the freezer, then turns. "There's just too many . . . too many."

Flora approaches and puts a hand on her shoulder. "You need some R&R time, honey, and I have just the thing. I met this very handsome man at the supermarket and he invited us out dancing."

Kate is reluctant. "I don't know, Flora."

Flora takes her by the arm, not willing to take no for an answer, and starts pushing her. "Well, I do. Now let's find you something to wear."

Later, in Flora's car, Flora notices that Kate is deep in thought and is gently rubbing her wedding ring. She has an idea and excuses herself for a minute. She dashes back into the house.

Inside she records a new message on her answering machine, "Hi, this is Flora. We're not here. We went out looking for some real men. If you're interested, we're at the Highway Bar and Grill. That's if you're interested." She hits the button, smiles, and exits.

That night, Flora escorts the unwilling Kate by the arm into the Highway Bar & Grill. Flora and Kate arrive at a table. They are about to sit when Jenny, the girl from the dress shop, recognizes them. She enthusiastically jumps up from her table and waves frantically until Flora spots her. Flora gives her a slight wave, then sits. The bar is packed and the dance floor is crowded with patrons dancing to an upbeat modern song.

Across the bar, Jenny leans over and tells her friends about Flora and Kate. Her boyfriend, Skeet, a punkish looking young man dressed in black, leans in to listen.

At home, Tex is frantically pacing the floor. Finally, he stops and walks to the phone and dials. He listens to the strange message on Flora's answering machine. Tex slams the phone down and mumbles to himself, "Real men. We'll see about that." He heads for the door.

In the bar, Flora sips on a Margarita while Kate drinks a Coke. Flora spots her date coming up behind Kate. She perks up and nonchalantly announces, "And here he comes."

Kate is shocked when she looks up to see a young Ben step up to their table. Flora pretends she just noticed him, "Oh, hi handsome. Have a seat."

Ben sits. "Hi, Katie."

Flora looks at Kate oddly, then back to Ben. "You two know—"

Before she can finish, Kate grabs Flora's hand and pulls her from the chair. "We need to talk."

Kate drags her to the ladies room and into a stall. She slams the door behind them, then grabs Flora and pushes her against the wall. Flora looks down at Kate's hands. "Honey, you've really got to get a grasp on this anger problem—"

Kate is so mad that she's talking through clenched teeth. "Do you know who that is?"

Flora studies her for a second, "You're talking through your teeth again." Kate relaxes her grip and Flora straightens up. "His name is Ben."

"Yes, his name is Ben. He's the same Ben that I had an affair with fifty years ago," Kate shouts, her voice echoing through the bathroom.

"Ohhhh," Flora says, almost impressed by the fact that Kate could have an affair.

"The same Ben who showed up and blackmailed me into seeing him."

"Ohhhh."

"And now that we're young again, he's the same Ben that's ruining my chances of ever having a happy marriage with Tex."

Flora realizes that this probably is not working out for the best. “This would have been good to know before, right?”

“Right.”

“But you gotta admit, he is handsome.”

Kate gives her a stern look.

“Okay, I’ll get rid of him.” Flora then opens the door revealing a crowd of women gathered around the stall, listening to the conversation.

“Did everyone get that?” Flora sarcastically asks the crowd.

The women all shake their heads. Flora shoves them aside and leads Kate through.

When Flora and Kate arrive back at the table, Ben is gone. Flora scans for him, shrugs her shoulders and takes a drink. Two young men step up to the table just as a slow country western song starts. They offer their hands for a dance. Flora stands and nods to Kate. Kate reluctantly gives in.

Outside the bar, Tex arrives, parks, and steps out of his car. He’s all slicked up dressed in his western clothes; double-breasted shirt with fringe, and cowboy boots.

While Flora and Kate dance, Ben appears out of nowhere and steps behind the man dancing with Kate. Kate is not paying much attention to her dancing partner, being preoccupied with scanning the place for Ben, knowing it could not be this easy to get rid of him. While her head is turned, Ben takes the young man’s place. She turns around and is shocked to find herself dancing with him. She instantly pulls back, but he has a firm hold on her. He pulls her toward him.

She pushes back. “I don’t think Flora’s gonna like this.”

Ben tries to pull her closer. “I’m not interested in Flora.”

Kate pulls back. “I’m not interested in you. I’m married, remember?”

Tex enters the bar and stops mid-floor. All the girls in the place turn to look at the dashing cowboy. Scanning the crowd, he catches a glimpse of Kate and Ben on the dance floor. Steaming, he pushes through the crowd toward them as the girls check him out and whisper to each other.

Arriving on the dance floor, Tex jerks Ben around and decks him with a punch. Grabbing Kate by the hand, he pulls her through the crowd. Kate jerks her hand free. Tex spins around to face her.

“You can’t just walk in and start slugging people, Tex!” she shouts.

On the dance floor, a crowd is gathering around Flora as she helps Ben to his feet. He rubs his jaw and looks for Tex. Spotting him across the dance floor, he stumbles toward him.

Flora looks up and says to herself, “Good move, Flora.” She runs after him.

A crowd has gathered around Tex and Kate who are facing off. Jenny and her boyfriend are in the crowd at the front.

“What am I suppose to do? My wife of fifty years—” Tex starts.

Kate corrects him, “Fifty one.”

Tex thinks about it and realizes that she’s right. “Okay, fifty one years, is dancing with a guy she had an affair with—”

The crowd ‘ooohhhs’ their disappointment.

Kate gives them a dirty look before starting in, “Well, I . . . if you had, well . . .,” She looks around. Everyone is waiting for a comeback. She tries again, “If you still loved me—”

Tex interrupts, “I do still love you.”

Kate starts to finish her thought, “—then you would have—” She stops, realizing what he just said. “You still love me?”

Tex nods.

Everyone ‘aaahhhs’ their approval.

Just then, Skeet steps through the crowd. He steps up to Kate and looks her over, impressed with her beauty. “Jenny told me about you. For eighty, you’re one hot bitch.”

Tex decks him without even blinking.

A waitress steps up with a tray of drinks and looks down at Skeet, then to Tex. “I think that was a compliment, cowboy.”

Tex grabs Kate’s hand and leads her away through the crowd. “Not where I come from.” Tex leads her out of the bar just as Ben staggers up, closely followed by Flora.

Ben looks down at the unconscious Skeet and then the crowd. They all look toward the exit. He stumbles toward the door with Flora still trailing.

Jenny bends down to help Skeet up. All the girls, in a semi-dreamy state, look toward the door where Tex exited.

The waitress, still holding the trays of drinks takes a swig from one of the glasses. "I wonder if there's any more where he came from?" The girls nod in agreement. Jenny drops Skeet back on the floor and walks away.

Outside the bar, Ben staggers out with Flora following. He watches Tex's car drive away, then rubs his jaw. He turns and looks at Flora. "How about a nightcap, honey?"

Flora slaps him and walks away.

Ben rubs the spot where she slapped him. "I've had better." He turns and looks at the fading taillights of Tex's car. "Much better."

On the lake's edge, Tex and Kate sit on a large old log. The stars are abundant and a full moon shines brightly over the lake. Tex turns to her, moves closer, and looks down. "I'd forgotten how much I love you. I'm sorry."

Kate reaches over, lifting his chin she looks into his eyes. "I've never forgotten."

They kiss. Tex slowly pulls back, cups her face in his hand. "We're very lucky to have a second chance. I want to do it right this time."

Kate smiles. "You did pretty good the first time. You think it could be better?"

"This time our lives will include a family."

She kisses his hand and looks up. "I'd love you for a hundred lifetimes, Tex, if you'd have me."

They kiss passionately against the full moon.

Outside the Calhoun's house two expensive dark cars pull up and park. The rear window of the second car slowly slides down revealing a young Garvey in sunglasses. He looks even more sinister than he did as an old man. Ben is seated next to him. While observing the house, Garvey hands Ben an envelope.

Ben opens the envelope and fans the money, then looks up at Garvey. "Remember, after you scare Tex off, Kate Calhoun is mine."

Garvey rolls the window up and lowers his glasses as he watches Ben get out of the car.

Another passenger, Tony, a big burly man, obviously hired muscle, looks at Garvey, then laughs. “Scare off?” He pulls out his gun and checks the chamber for bullets. He puts it back into his holster. “I’ll scare him off all right. Permanently.”

“Get all the vegetables. All of them,” Garvey reminds him. Tony raises his large frame to exit the vehicle.

On the dark street, four goons climb out of the front car. They pull their weapons as they approach Tex’s house.

Tex and Kate pass the two black cars on the street and pull into their drive. The couple, hand-in-hand, enters the house.

When Tex flips on the light, Tony instinctively hits him in the head with the butt of his gun. Tex collapses as Kate screams. She starts to bend down to help Tex, but one of the thugs grabs her by the arm and pulls her away.

The other two thugs lift the unconscious Tex by the arms and drag him out the door. The thug holding Kate starts to follow.

Tony stops him, “He said to get rid of the cowboy. She stays.”

Realizing what this means, Kate struggles to go after them, but the thug pulls her back. “Noooo. Tex!”

Tony opens the door and exits. “Keep her here.”

Tony joins the other thugs in the garden where they are filling garbage bags with vegetables. Kate sees the men in the garden through her kitchen window. “What are you doing?”

The thug pushes her toward the kitchen chair and aims his gun at her. “Some midnight shopping. Now, sit down and shut up.”

On the street, the two thugs load an unconscious Tex into the back of the first car and close the door. They climb in as the others cross the street with their bags of vegetables, open the trunk, and throw them in.

Tony sticks his head back in the kitchen doorway and motions for the thug to leave. He backs out and they disappear. Kate immediately runs to the telephone and dials 911. The telephone is dead. She drops it and runs out the door. She rushes to the street as the cars zoom away. She runs after them. “Tex!” She drops down to her knees. “Tex!”



CHAPTER IV
Spiked Punch and Alligators

The black cars turn on a dark, deserted road next to the horse farm and drive toward the lake. Arriving at the lake's edge, they pull up and park near the dock. Opening the trunk, they pull the unconscious Tex from it and tie his hands and feet with chains. Tex moans and starts coming around.

Garvey steps from his car and walks up to see the men's work. Tex groggily looks up, trying to focus on Garvey, who is silhouetted against the car's headlights.

As one of the thugs wraps heavy chains around Tex's legs, Garvey steps up. "Nothing personal, cowboy. Ben is very interested in your wife and it seems you could be a problem to our deal." Garvey steps back and nods to the thugs. "Get rid of him."

After the chains are secured, the two thugs carry a struggling Tex to the boat dock and toss him out into the lake.

Tex hits the water with a splash and immediately goes under. The two thugs walk away as Tex struggles to get his head above water. Barely succeeding, he spots the horse farm stable on the hill. He plunges below the water then emerges again long enough to hear the thugs conversation as they walk back to their car.

"So who is this Mr. Garvey?" one thug asks the other.

"Friend of Louie's."

Trying to stay above water, Tex observes the cars driving away. He tries to get Lightning's attention by blowing out a whistle, but can't, and drops back under the surface. Struggling once more, he finally surfaces and lets out a loud whistle.

Inside the horse stable, Lightning, having heard the whistle, begins pacing the stall. Finally, he kicks the stall door open and runs out.

Popping up one last time, Tex lets out another desperate whistle before going under. Lightning makes it in time as he strides into the lake up to his neck. Under the water, Tex is losing consciousness when he sees Lightning's tail. He grabs hold with his tied hands. Lightning turns

and treads for shore, dragging Tex with him. Tex hits the shore and collapses. Lightning leans down with his head and nudges him.

“Good boy, Lightning. Yeah, you did good.” Tex wobbles to his feet, still tied up. “Now I’m gonna need one more favor.”

At Tex’s house, the neighbors are gathered in his front lawn. A distraught Kate has one of Tex’s guns and Flora is holding her back to prevent her from leaving.

“This is a matter for the police!” Flora advises. But Kate is determined to leave.

“We don’t have time. Now move!”

One of the neighbors then spots Tex. “There’s Tex!”

Everyone turns to look, as Lightning prances up with Tex slung over his back. Kate runs and grabs the horse, holding the reins as others help Tex down. Flora immediately starts undoing the chains as others crowd around.

When his hands are free, Kate throws her arms around him. “I thought I’d lost you.”

Tex looks at the gun in her hand and gently removes it.

“I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for Lightning.” Tex reaches up and strokes Lightning’s face. “Ain’t that right, boy.” He turns back to Kate. “Ben’s involved and some fella named Garvey.”

Flora steps up. “Mr. Garvey? You sure?”

“Who is Garvey?” Tex asks.

“Mr. Garvey owns all of Elderville, plus some,” Flora replies.

Kate helps Tex toward the house. “They took everything from the garden.”

Tex stops, realizing what this means he says, “They know our secret.” He leans on Kate as they continue toward the front door. “So are the police on the way?”

Kate and Flora look at each other. Tex stops.

“All the phones are out,” Kate responds.

Tex starts walking again. “I’ll drive to the police station.”

Kate touches Tex’s head and draws back bloody fingers. “Not like this you’re not.” Kate then helps Tex to the front door.

“What about Lightning?” Tex asks.

Kate whistles. Lightning prances up. She strokes his face. “I don’t think George would mind if Lightning spent the night in our backyard.”

That night, as Kate finishes tending Tex’s injuries at the kitchen table, there’s a knock on the back door. Tex and Kate cautiously peek through the kitchen curtains.

“It’s an old man,” Tex notes.

Kate looks him over but doesn’t recognize him. “Might be one of the neighbors.”

Tex unlocks the door and opens it to reveal a very old Happy standing there with his bag. Tex opens the door wider and Kate moves alongside him.

“You know that there’s a horse in your back yard?” Happy announces, as he looks at his boots and makes a squeamish face. “I think I might have stepped in something.” Happy looks back up.

Then it dawns on Tex who the old man standing in front of him is. “Happy?” Tex asks.

“Yeah. I’m Happy. Not many folks call me that anymore, though.”

Happy studies Tex and Kate, realizing they look their younger selves. “I didn’t know Tex and Kate had any children. You sure are the spitting image of him.” Happy shakes his head in amazement at Kate. “And you look just like Kate. How about that, they had a boy and a—” Happy stops, knowing darn well they never had any children. He rolls his eyes, pondering an explanation.

Tex sees that he’s having difficulty. “Kate and . . . I, I mean me and . . .” Tex gives up trying to explain and opens the door wide. “I think you’d better come in.”

In the living room, Tex and Kate sit on both sides of Happy, whose mouth is gaped wide open and his eyes glazed over. Kate waves her hand in front of his eyes. He doesn’t blink or respond. “You sure he isn’t dead. He didn’t take it very well when you told him.” She places her ear against Happy’s nose to check his breathing, then moves back.

Tex thinks, then stands. “There’s only one thing left to do.” Tex goes to the kitchen and rummages through the cabinet. He walks back wiping off a dusty bottle of Bourbon.

Kate stands. “My God, Tex. You’ll kill him.”

Tex untwists the cap. “It’ll either kill him or snap him out of it.” Tex pours a little in Happy’s mouth, then lifts his chin and tilts his head back. Happy swallows and his eyes bulge. Suddenly, he snaps out of it and coughs.

Shaking his head, he tries to focus on Tex and Kate. “Am I dead?”

Tex laughs. “No.”

“Then how come you’re young and I’m old?” Happy asks.

Tex puts his hand on Happy’s shoulder. “Cause you haven’t had your vegetables today.”

Kate stands and walks to the kitchen. She comes back with a heaping bowl of assorted vegetables. She plops them down in front of Happy and smiles. “Eat up.”

Happy shrugs his shoulders and starts eating.

Garvey is busy making preparations to protect his investment by installing additional commercial refrigerators in his mansion basement to store the vegetables.

One of the thugs finishes loading a refrigerator with vegetables as Mr. Garvey looks on. He closes the door. “All done Mr. Garvey.”

Tony enters to give Garvey a status. “Elderville is shutdown. No one goes in or out.”

Mr. Garvey is pleased. “Very good, boys.”

Tony keeps looking at the refrigerators and doesn’t get it. “If you don’t mind me askin’, why are we jackin’ someone’s vegetables?”

Garvey smiles. “Those aren’t vegetables, boys. They’re gold.”

Tony scratches his head. “Looked like vegetables to me.”

Garvey takes out a very expensive wallet and removes his ID. He hands it to Tony. “How old would you say I am?”

Tony takes the ID and reads it. “I’d say about thirty—” He’s startled by the information on the ID. “Jesus, This can’t be right.” The other thug leans over and tries to read it.

Garvey cuts to the chase. “I’m eighty nine years old.”

They both look at him in amazement as he takes the ID back. “How’s that possible?” Tony asks.

Garvey looks at the refrigerators. “What’s in those refrigerators is worth millions . . . maybe billions.”

The butler, an older black man named Miles, appears at the top of the stairs. "Sir, the mayor is here to see you."

"Bring him to the study, Miles."

Garvey then walks up the stairs. The thugs look at each other and smile. They quickly follow.

The Butler leads Howard to the study. Howard doesn't realize that Garvey is young because a single desk lamp dimly lights the room.

Howard approaches Mr. Garvey, who is seated at his desk, "Sorry, to bother you so late, but—" Howard is at a loss for words upon seeing the youthful Garvey seated behind the desk. "Mr. Garvey?"

"Yes, it's me, Howard. And yes, I'm young . . . just like you and the others."

"But how?"

"I ate the vegetables, just like you."

"My wife can't see so good. She thinks I'm on Viagra."

Garvey looks up disgusted. "Really, Howard. Did you come here to tell me about your sex life?"

"Oh. No. All the phones are out in Elderville, even the cell phones. When I tried to drive into town, some men told me that the road was out and I couldn't leave. It's a kind of strange. Don't you think?"

Garvey rolls his eyes sideways at Howard's stupidity. "It's simple, Howard. I did it."

"You did? Why?"

"We have a situation and until it's resolved, I'm afraid I can't let anyone leave Elderville."

"Mr. Garvey, I don't think you can do that."

Garvey becomes impatient with Howard. His voice raises, "I own this community Howard. I can do any damn thing I please."

Howard still doesn't get it, so he continues, "Well I don't think—"

Garvey stands, irate, interrupting him, "Shut up and sit down, Howard."

Howard is speechless and just stares at Garvey. Garvey raises his voice even louder. "SIT DOWN!"

Startled, Howard slowly slides into the chair. Garvey moves around the desk to Howard. "I want things to go on as usual, Howard."

Howard starts to speak. Garvey puts his hand on his shoulder, and moves close. "As usual. Until this is over. Do you understand?"

Howard starts to speak but refrains as Garvey moves back to his desk. "Look, Howard, you have your annual costume ball coming up. I want everyone to come. Relax. Right after that, I'm sure things will be finished."

Howard is somewhat reluctant to speak, but feels compelled. "Mr. Garvey, I don't think people are going to come. Not with—"

Garvey interrupts, his eyebrows dipping down, suggesting his patience is wearing thin, "I insist, Howard."

Mr. Garvey then settles back and pushes a button under the desk. Shortly there is a knock on the door. Tony sticks his head in the doorway. Garvey waves him in. Howard gets up and looks back as he starts to exit. Tony steps in pulling behind him a bound and gagged Flora. Howard is alarmed by Garvey's tactics but doesn't have the courage to say anything.

Garvey sees the shock on Howard's face. "Like I said, Howard. I insist."

Flora struggles with Tony and finally manages to kick him in the shin. Tony grabs his shin. "Ouch!" After rubbing his wound, Tony turns in anger and slaps her. Flora stumbles back against the wall and slides down.

When Tony turns back around, Howard can see the gun under his jacket. Howard looks at Flora and then back to Garvey. Garvey sees that Howard is ready to play along. "Howard. Let's have that little party," Garvey glances at his watch, "this morning. Let's say ten thirty. I don't want to waste any more time. I'm a very busy man."

Howard nervously looks at his watch. "That's only a few hours away."

"Don't make me insist again, Howard."

Howard stands quickly and leaves.

Garvey motions to Tony with his finger and glances at Flora. Flora's head is slumped over as if unconscious.

One of her eyes sneaks open.

Tony steps up to Garvey for orders. "I'm gonna need something to spike some punch. Something that'll send the residents of Elderville

off into a deep sleep.” Garvey clasps his hands together as he relishes the thought.

Tony is struggling with the order. He shrugs his shoulders. “Deep sleep? You mean sleeping pills, Mr. Garvey?”

Garvey rolls his eyes at his stupidity. “Something that’ll kill them, you idiot. I want them dead. Get me something.”

Tony gets it. “Oh. Yeah.” Walking over to Flora, he grabs her by the hands and drags her out.

Garvey shakes his head. Just then, the door opens from an adjoining room. Ben steps in and looks around somewhat shaken and solemn. Garvey notices. “You don’t look well, Ben. Maybe you should skip the party. But then again, I believe Kate’s going to be there.” Ben steps toward the door.

“Oh, Ben,” Garvey adds. Ben stops and turns. “Wear a costume. After all, it is a costume party.”

Ben shakes his head and leaves.

Tex is dressed, has the car keys and is getting ready to leave his house when there is a knock on the door. He opens it to reveal Howard. He looks shaken and scared. Tex grabs him, jerks him in, and closes the door with his other hand.

Then he pulls the mayor up to his face. “Some men tried to kill me last night, Mayor. And somehow they’ve shut off Elderville from the outside world.” Tex pulls him closer, his temper rising. “It’s Garvey, isn’t it?”

Howard struggles to get free. “Please,” Howard pleads as a bead of sweat rolls off his forehead. Tex relinquishes his hold on Howard. Howard straightens his clothes as Kate approaches with arms crossed. Howard confesses, “It’s Mr. Garvey. He did it. He’s shut down all of Elderville. He’s gone crazy. He insisted that we have the costume party. Insisted!” Howard wipes his forehead. “Could I have a drink of water?”

Kate gets a glass of water and hands it to him. He drinks it down and hands back the empty glass. Kate puts the glass in the sink and turns. “It doesn’t make any sense. No one will go.”

“He has Flora,” Howard warns.

“Flora! That—” Kate grabs the keys from Tex and starts toward the door.

“One of the men working for Garvey is wearing a gun. They’re probably all armed,” Howard nervously adds.

Kate stops and turns. “Fine.” She crosses her arms and looks to Tex. “Now what?”

Howard falls back against the door. “What are we gonna do? We have less than two hours.”

Tex looks at Kate, then Howard. “So we go.”

Kate looks at Tex like he’s nuts. “This isn’t a TV show, Tex. They have real guns.”

Tex thinks about it for a second. “Then I’ll need my bullets, Kate.”

Kate can’t believe what she’s hearing. “Damn it, Tex. This isn’t one of our shows where you and Happy go—”

A familiar, but younger voice interrupts their dispute. “We going somewhere?” Happy asks.

They all turn to see a young Happy standing in the doorway dressed in his old western clothes. Happy looks down at his clothes, then back up and smiles. “See. Happy’s here.”

Kate puts her hands on her hips. “Oh, now I feel so much better.”

Happy hears a familiar sound of canned audience laughter that was used throughout the TV show. Happy scans the room for the source of the laughter. “Did anyone else hear that?”

They all look at him with blank faces.

Tex turns back to Howard to continue their plan. “Howard, go tell everyone to meet at the hall for the party.

Howard, not happy about the idea, turns to leave, then hesitates. “I’ll try. I don’t think they’ll come.”

“You know what happens if they don’t?” Tex reminds him.

Howard already has it figured out, “Yeah. They’ll probably come after us.”

Howard leaves as Happy approaches. Tex turns to Kate and puts out his hand. “The bullets, Kate.” Kate looks at Tex, then Happy, and unwillingly leaves to get them.

Happy looks at Tex, puzzled. “What bullets?”

Over at the community center, Garvey, Ben, Flora, Tony and several other thugs enter the hall. Garvey shoves Flora forward. She turns and swings at him. Tony catches her hand and shoves her back.

Garvey steps to Flora and squeezes her face. "Get things ready, if you don't want anything to happen to that pretty face."

She spits on Garvey. "Kiss my backside, sugar."

Tony and the thugs all point their weapons at her. Garvey holds up his hand, stopping them. Flora turns and pushes her way past a thug and enters the kitchen area.

Garvey nods to Tony to follow her. "Go make the punch, and make sure it's spiked." Tony pats a bulge in his jacket pocket and enters the kitchen.

Ben watches Tony and then looks at Garvey, wanting to say something to stop it. Garvey suspects as much. "Don't worry. You'll get the girl." Garvey puts his hand on Ben's shoulder. "In every western I ever saw, the villain never got the girl. Well, that's all about to change." Garvey laughs. His three thugs look at each other and start laughing.

Ben tries to smile. "Yeah, guess so." Later, Tony prods Flora out of the kitchen as she carries a large bowl of punch. She puts it down and steps back while Garvey eyes her considering some ideas he has of his own. "I just might rope myself a filly while we're at it. Yeehaw." Ben doesn't see any humor in it.

At the other end of the center, the door opens. The residents of Elderville walk slowly in with some hesitation. Some are halfheartedly dressed in costumes.

Garvey notices then motions a couple of the men toward the opposite door. "Watch for Calhoun. She could be trouble. Right Ben?" Ben doesn't respond. The two thugs walk down to the far door and stand on each side.

Outside the community center, Tex, Happy, and Kate are dressed as they were in their TV series. They watch the last resident enter as Tex finishes loading his gun. Tex twirls his gun then puts it back into his holster.

Kate is uneasy about the situation. "You got them in there, Tex. I hope you can get them out."

Tex leans forward and kisses her, then pulls back. "Me too."

They turn and walk toward the center.

Tex, Happy, and Kate enter the community center where one of the thugs immediately butts Tex with the stock of a shotgun. Tex tumbles forward. As Happy turns, he's also hit from behind. Happy collapses. A thug pulls Kate, who is desperately trying to get to Tex, toward the other end of the hall to the awaiting Ben and Garvey.

Ben tries to hold onto the struggling Kate as the mayor helps Tex to his feet. Tex rubs his head and tries to regroup himself.

Garvey steps up. He sees that Tex is alive. He looks at Tony disappointed, "I thought you took care of the cowboy?" Tony shrugs his shoulders. Garvey turns back to the crowd, "Well, I'm glad we could all be together to celebrate this wonderful event . . . our youth." Garvey nods toward his men. They all aim weapons at Tex.

Some of the residents help Happy to his feet as Garvey continues, "I'd like you all to form a line for some punch. Then I can propose a toast."

The residents all look at each other not sure what to do. Flora looks at Kate, and knowing that the punch is poisoned, motions toward the punch with her eyes. Tex looks around, trying to figure a way out. He sees Pete, the old baseball player, standing next to the pool table. Signaling Pete, he motions to a pool ball. Pete smiles.

Garvey notices the residents are not drinking the punch. "I'm afraid, I must insist."

The reluctant residents form a line for the punch. Pete, seizing the opportunity, picks up the pool ball and winds up, then throws. The pool ball strikes one of the thugs in the head and drops him to the floor. Before the other thugs can aim their guns, Tex draws his and starts firing. Tex accurately and easily shoots the guns from the thugs' hands.

Ben, seeing that things are going badly, grabs Kate and drags her out the back door. Flora adds to the chaos by kicking the punch bowl, sending it toppling to the floor.

Garvey motions Tony into action. "Kill the cowboy . . . again. This time do it right!"

Tony lunges for his gun, and is met by Tex. He flips his guns back into his holster and slugs Tony, sending him crashing over a table. Tony springs up and rushes Tex, knocking him backward over some tables. The residents cheer for Tex as the fight continues.

Meanwhile, one of the thugs bends down to pick up his gun. He is met by Happy. Happy smiles then hits him with a croquet mallet. The thug collapses.

The fight between Tex and Tony continues and Garvey quietly slips out the back door with a couple of his thugs trailing. Flora runs after them, looking for some payback.

Outside the community center, Kate and Ben climb into a black car. They are met by Garvey and his two thugs. Ben tries to restrain Kate as she struggles to get free. She screams for Tex as the car pulls away.

Flora arrives just as the car speeds away. Realizing that Kate has been kidnapped, she runs back in to get Tex.

When she enters, she runs into one of the thugs trying to escape. He's a little startled and she's pissed. "Things didn't quite work out . . .," she says sarcastically, then punches him in the face. He falls over. She looks down at him, "did they, sugar?" Then she steps over him.

Inside the community center, Tex and Tony are still brawling. Tony swings at Tex. He ducks and punches Tony in the stomach.

Flora quickly approaches and shouts. "Tex!" As Tex looks, he is punched in the face and staggers back. She runs around to get closer. "Tex!" He looks and is punched again.

"Not now, Flora!" he shouts, while ducking a punch.

She pursues, "They took Kate!"

Tex stops fighting and looks around. Tony also looks around. Tex turns and punches him a good one. Tony is knocked out and falls backwards.

Tex, Happy, and Flora run out of the center in a panic looking for Kate. Flora points. "That way." Tex turns and runs home to get his car. Happy and Flora follow.

Tex revs the engine while Happy and Flora jump inside. He drives out of town and through the roadblock. The two thugs standing by the roadblock fire their guns at his car as he speeds away.

Tex enters the highway and floors it. Soon he's fast approaching Garvey's car. The windows roll down and two thugs lean out and fire at Tex's car. Tex swerves to avoid the gunfire, but still pursues. Inside Garvey's car, Kate tries to pull the thug's gunhand and is elbowed.

Tex rams their car causing it to swerve through the traffic. The thugs fire again, hitting the tires. The blowout sends the car swerving into a power pole. Tex's car crashes as Garvey's car speeds away.

Tex, Happy, and Flora climb out to inspect the damage. Tex kicks the car in frustration. Tex removes his hat and starts to throw it, when he spots the horse farm up on the hill. "I have an idea." He runs toward the horse farm.

Tex gallops away on Lightning, while Happy and Flora trail him on two other horses. George waves to them with his cowboy hat from the horse farm.

On the highway, the traffic has become congested and has slowed down considerably. The Garvey car slows down as well.

Inside, Ben pours some bottled water on a handkerchief and tries to apply it to Kate's black eye. She knocks his hand away. Garvey, seated in the front, sees this in the mirror. "Once you're at the airport. You and miss cowboy star are on your own. Personally, I'd drug her or let her go. She's too much trouble."

Kate grabs the handkerchief from Ben's hand. She dabs her eye and glares at Ben.

"What did we ever do to you?" she asks abruptly.

"What did you ever do to me? Tex. He's the one. When they came to him at the end of the second season and said that they wanted to get a new villain. He let 'em. He was the star. He could've stopped them. You think anyone would hire a villain? He destroyed my career."

Kate dabs her eye and shakes her head.

Ben continues, "Yeah. It don't mean much to you, but to me, it was all I had." Ben studies her, like he could possibly be in love with her. "Then there's you."

Kate looks up at Ben. Maybe she saw something in him at one time. Whatever that was is gone now. She shakes her head and looks out the window.

Meanwhile, Tex, Happy, and Flora gallop through the traffic, closing in on Garvey's car. People in the cars are sticking their heads out, excitedly pointing at the trio as they ride past.

Ben starts to explain his motivation to Kate, "I'm really not that bad of a person if—"

Garvey interrupts, having heard enough, "This is all so touching. You don't want her. You want him . . . dead. Out of the picture. You're nothing to her while he's alive."

Ben realizes that Garvey is right.

Garvey continues, "And right now all I want is to get rid of you two washed up cowboy stars, get my vegetables and get out of Dodge. Let 'em have Elderville."

Ben studies Kate's face as she stares out the window. "You're right." Ben reaches over and snatches a gun from the belt of the thug next to him. "Turn the car around. I'm gonna finish this."

Garvey looks out the back window and sees Tex, Happy, and Flora riding toward them from behind. "Looks like the Calvary is here."

They all turn around and look.

Kate whispers to herself, "Tex."

Two of the thugs hang out the windows and shoot at Tex, Happy, and Flora.

Tex signals for them to spread out. Happy and Flora split off and Tex pursues, dodging the bullets. He draws and fires hitting one of the tires. He maneuvers around and shoots out two more tires.

The rims of the tires are soon grinding on the pavement. The thug driving is having a hard time controlling the car and smoke is starting to billow out from under it. He veers over toward Gatorsville, a well-known tourist trap. Tourists run as the car slides into the drive. Gunshots ring out as the thugs fire through the billowing smoke.

Garvey and the others quickly climb out of the car, coughing from the smoke. Ben drags Kate with him, the gun now pointed at her head.

As they all move backwards toward the building, a large alligator lurches forward in his pen at Garvey. He stumbles back to avoid its jaws.

Suddenly, Tex appears in the smoke, reared up on Lightning. He draws his guns and fires at two of the thugs with guns. Sparks fly from their weapons, as his bullets find their mark. Their guns fly from their hands. Spectators are beginning to gather to watch the spectacle as if it were part of the entertainment.

Ben steps forward through the smoke with Kate, his gun still pointed at her head. “Now you’re gonna lose the most precious thing in you life . . . your—”

Ben’s words are cut short when Flora lands on his back and she grabs his gunhand, pulling it up. The gun fires into the air.

Tex flies off the horse and is immediately upon Ben and Kate. Grabbing Kate, he pulls her back.

Ben shakes Flora loose causing her to go flying backwards onto the ground. Kate runs to her as Ben recovers and turns to point his gun at Tex.

With lightning speed, Tex draws both guns and has the drop on Ben. Tex warns him, “Don’t Ben.”

Ben thinks about his next action.

Garvey steps through the smoke and stops. “Do it, Ben. He has it coming, or did you forget what you want?” Ben drops the gun on the ground, giving up. “You disappoint me, Ben. But, what can you expect from a washed up TV show villain.”

Then without warning, Garvey charges Tex and slams into his side, knocking him down. Tex, not expecting the attack, has the wind knocked out of him. He slowly starts to get up. “Let me show you how it’s done.” Garvey kicks Tex in the side as he tries to get up, doubling him over. “There’s a certain technique to—” Garvey starts to kick him again but Tex turns and charges, knocking Garvey backwards to the edge of the alligator pen.

The spectators move closer to observe the fight.

Ben reaches over to pick up the gun and is met by Happy. Happy punches him, sending him backwards. He looks down at Ben on the ground, “That’s what you git for making me mad, dadgummit!” Kate laughs at his remark as her and Flora move up to him and pat him on the back. Happy tugs a rope with his other hand and the two rope-bound thugs stumble forward.

Meanwhile, Garvey seizes an opportunity to use the alligator to his advantage. As they struggle next to the animal’s enclosure, Garvey is able to push Tex’s chin back, forcing his head toward the alligator’s mouth. It snaps out but Tex punches Garvey, breaking his hold just in time. Tex stands up, pulling Garvey with him and starts to punch his face.

Kate steps in, relieving Tex, and grabs Garvey. “May I?” Tex steps out of the way as Kate draws back and wallops him. His head is snapped back. His eyes roll up as he falls backwards, knocked out.

The spectators applaud and cheer.

Later, as the police are rounding up the criminals, Tex and Happy mount their horses. Tex pulls the reins back and forces Lightning down so Kate can climb on behind him. Flora mounts the other horse. Tex rears up. He and Kate wave their cowboy hats at the spectators. Tex looks over his shoulder at Kate. “Our life together could really be wonderful, if—”

“If what?” she asks.

“If you could just quit slugging people.”

Kate laughs as the spectators applaud.

Unbeknown to everyone, in the midst of the crowd, someone is crawling away. It’s Garvey. Once on the other side of the crowd, he stands cautiously, and peers through the crowd for the police. He sneaks away.

Later, in his basement, Garvey bursts through the door, his clothes a mess, his face black and blue. He stumbles through the darkened basement to the refrigerators. He throws open one of the doors to reveal wilted vegetables. He picks up a rotten tomato. It squishes between his fingers.

Louie, a large man in a very expensive suit, Garvey’s mobster connection from Miami, steps from the shadows. “Quite a mess. Huh, Nate?”

Garvey turns around in shock. “Louie?”

Two large black men with shaved heads, who would make college linebackers look like sissies, step up next to Louie.

He moves in closer, trailed by his two thugs. Garvey swallows. Louie rolls an unlit and expensive cigar between his fingers. “I gave you six good men and fifty grand. Don’t tell me we went into the vegetable business.”

Garvey moves closer to Louie. The thugs start to make their move. Louie puts his hand up as he notices that Garvey is much younger. He’s puzzled. Garvey notices.

“That’s right, I’m young.” He motions toward the vegetables.
“They did it. The vegetables.” Louie examines his face.

“They did one hell of a job. Is that what you did with my money? Got a facelift?”

“No, not a facelift. I’m really young again!”

“Good. I’m glad you’re young again, Nate. That means you can hold your breath longer. That’ll come in handy at the bottom of the lake.”

Garvey backs up in horror and bumps into the refrigerator as the two goons advance. He grabs some of the vegetables and throws them as they move in.

On the highway, Louie’s long black car drives away. Garvey’s face is plastered against the window as he silently yells for help. It passes Tex and Kate, Happy, and Flora as they ride into Elderville on their horses.

Up ahead the residents are waiting for the hero’s return. They converge enthusiastically on the approaching riders. As Flora is helped to dismount, they encircle Tex, Kate, and Happy and applaud. Tex turns to Kate and pulls her close to him. “I think we’re too young to retire.”

Kate leans toward him close enough for him to feel her sweet breath on his face. “What’d you have in mind?”

“Maybe a comeback.”

“What about a family?”

“That too. I promise,” he says. She kisses him passionately. The crowd goes crazy, whistling and cheering. Tex and Kate turn to Happy. He smiles a big smile.

Seventy years later, there is a picture sitting on a desk of Tex and Kate with their horse, Lightning. They are waving their hats while Lightning rears up. Through the window of a penthouse, the landscape of a futuristic city is visible.

Nearby in the dining room, there is lively chattering of a typical large family gathering. Seated in an ultra-modern, formal dining room are three married couples in their sixties and seventies.

A middle-aged lady looking a lot like Kate enters the room carrying a pitcher of vegetable juice. She methodically walks around the

seated guests and fills their glasses. Seated at the other end of the table is a middle aged man who looks a lot like Tex. The lady who resembles Kate finishes filling the glasses, puts down the pitcher, and stands by the man who looks like Tex.

One of the older men seated, Allen, lifts the glass and looks down toward the couple. “Mom, Dad, you promised that you’d finally tell us how you’ve stayed so young.”

Tex and Kate reply together in unison, “Vegetables.”

Unconvinced, the older children at the table pick up their glasses. Allen starts to sip, then stops and looks at them. “First, tell us how old you really are.”

“I’m a hundred and fifty one. Your mom is a hundred and fifty,” Tex replies nonchalantly.

They all immediately start guzzling their drinks.

That evening in the park, Tex and Kate and their six young children and spouses walk hand-in-hand in the park. The park is set amidst a futuristic city. Flying cars zoom overhead. A young Allen approaches his mother and father who are walking hand-in-hand. “Dad, you ever thought of sharing this?”

Tex puts his arm around Allen as they walk. “That’s been taken care of, son.” Allen smiles as the others join them and they walk toward the sunset together.

At a FDA office, Lesley, a young male lab technician, opens a small cooler and takes out a cold bottle of juice. He studies it and then notices that there’s a note attached. He removes the note and reads:

Our lives are very precious. But not as precious as the ones we love and share that life with. Sometimes, we get lost and forget these things and by the time we realize what we’ve lost, our lives are over. All we really need is a second chance. We’ve already had that thanks to what’s in this package. We’d like to share our joy with the world. We’ll leave that up to you.

Good luck, Tex and Kate Calhoun

P.S. It works on horses too.

The lab technician realizes that this means something very important. He lays down the note and picks up the bottle. Just then, another technician in a smock wheels a lab cart past him. He puts the bottle in the cart.

The technician stops and lifts the bottle. “What’s this?”

The lab technician shrugs his shoulders. “Probably nothing, just run the usual pre-analysis on it.”

The technician puts it back in the cart and wheels it away.

The lab technician watches him walk off and says to himself, “Then again ...”

The End