

(Big Sky)

## **The Jones Girls - 1988**

On a raw spring day in 1988 a dusty Ford with California plates brought the Jones girls to Redrock Montana and after driving slowly from one end of the town to the other they stopped at the Best Western Motel and rented a room. They told the clerk that they didn't know how long they would stay but they paid for three nights in advance.

Gail Johnson was used to seeing wanderers looking over the town. Most were young men just out of the Army or college or maybe jail but they all had the same look about them. She looked at the register and wondered where Anne and Rosemary Jones were coming from and where they were going. She doubted that Redrock would be their final destination.

After they had checked in at the motel they drove through town looking for a place for lunch. They passed over the Denny's and the fast food places and settled on Mom's Kitchen as the most likely spot to see what the locals were like. It was clean and tidy with a lunch counter and several tables and booths.

Seated in a corner booth they ordered the Lunch Special and watched the other's come and go. There were farmers and business men, clerks and housewives, boys and girls. They noticed that old army fatigues were popular dress for the younger men and blue jeans and flannel shirts were the dress of choice for most of the others. The waitress seemed to know everyone's name and there were some rude jokes that passed between her and her customers. A sheriff's deputy ordered sandwiches and a thermos of coffee to-go and the girls never saw any money change hands.

When Anne paid the check she asked the waitress if there was a real estate office in town and the girl told her that she was in luck,

"Hey Charley, are you open for business?" she shouted at a balding man who was eating alone in a back booth. He looked up with a smile and motioned the girls to join him.

"Hi I'm Charley Buckster" he said extending his hand.

"I'm Anne Jones and this is my sister Rosemary. We might be interested in some property in the area. Do you know of a place near town with some land?"

"Well I've got a three hundred acre farm on my books, is that big enough?"

Rosie laughed,

"I think that my sister gave you the wrong idea, how about a place with one or two acres"

He went over his list and found two places that might interest them and he was available, after lunch, to show them around.

The first would have been a nice find except it was on the busy highway, at least as busy as Redrock ever got. The sisters looked at it for a long time then dismissed it. The second was a small farm with five acres of pasture land. There was a barn and a fairly new house

and Anne seemed to like it but Rosemary had no interest. Out of curiosity Charley asked what she disliked about it.

“It has no character, here it sits in the middle of flat fields of alfalfa. If there were ever any trees around it they’re gone now. I just don’t ever see myself liking the way it looks.”

Charley had heard this before. A man would see the fields and the barn as good things and the lack of trees meant less maintenance and water bills. His wife or in this case, these girls saw it and flat and drab.

“I do have another place but I’m not sure that it’s what your looking for. It’s a small house up in Rattlesnake Canyon, there’s two acres of land but with all of the rocks and trees there’s room for a garden but not much else. The house is really more of a cabin but it does have telephone and electricity. The water’s from a well and there’s a fairly new septic tank for sewage. Its four miles up a private road that the county doesn’t maintain or snow plough. There are several other places up there and someone always clears off the snow so they can get to town. If I haven’t scared you off by now we can drive up and look it over.”

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When they turned off the highway there was a locked gate with a sign warning that trespassers were not allowed. Someone had drawn the outline of a rifle under the warning which caused the girls looked at each other but Charley dismissed it.

“Oh don’t be concerned with that, this is Montana and people take pride in being self sufficient but it’s mostly just bluff.”

He unlocked one of the six padlocks on the chain and they drove up the canyon. When they got into the hills, the county was very pretty. There were groves of aspen and spruce and a stream ran near the road and where the canyon widened there were several beaver ponds. In the first couple of miles they saw three deer but the girls were sure that there must be many more nearby.

They came to a small farm with a house and barn. It was probably ten acre of fields planted in corn and in the distance a man was sitting on a tractor watching the car. Charley waved but if the man saw him he made no sign.

“That’s Karl Hamilton, he and his wife have lived here forever. He’s from one of the old-time families here in the valley, his son Rex lives in town.”

When they got to the house, it was as Charley had described. It had originally been just a cabin that had been built many years ago but there were at least two additions that had enlarged it to what it was today. It sat back from the road in a grove of trees that nearly hid it completely.