
THE ROCKING CHAIR

BY

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~ Chapter One ~

Driving his rusty red pickup truck off the highway, Ted Nathenson downshifted to second and made a right at the first intersection off the exit ramp. He'd been burning up the road for hours and needed a break, even if it cost a few minutes from his trip north to visit his brother. The Interstate traffic continued whizzing by without him. The sun had set long ago, leaving only the outline of treetops visible with moonlight cascading over them. The road ahead was sheathed in darkness, save the beam from Ted's headlights.

Ted didn't have any kids, and his ex-wife, who had left him a couple years ago for a shoe salesman, didn't really count as family anymore, even though she lived a mere twelve blocks from his Orlando apartment. There was no need to stop over and dig up old arguments. What's the sense? The marriage was over, his life had moved on and so had she. He had better things to do with his time.

So he wanted to visit his only brother, John, in Connecticut. The trip was a break from the drudgery of his auto-body repair job, which he hated; but it paid the bills. He hadn't called John to let him know he was coming, he never did. Ted liked the element of surprise. Just showing up on a weekend with a grin and a six-pack was all he felt obliged for. He and his brother would relax with a few beers while comparing notes over their love lives: who had the most dates and who had bombed out the most – which was likely the case for both. Whether they admitted it or not was another story.

As Ted spun his wheels through the town's only stop sign, the sleeping hamlet of Manning, South Carolina, greeted him with a big yawn. Aside from a few two story wood paneled buildings, one of which had boarded-up windows, there was no sign of civilization anywhere; there were no traffic lights or billboards, there wasn't even a deli in sight to order a decent sandwich. With so little to offer weary travelers, he wondered why the town had bothered with a highway exit ramp.

"Good grief," he mumbled, questioning his judgment for choosing this exit rather than the next one up the highway. But he knew the answer; it was very simple. The next exit was another fifteen miles; more distance than he felt his tired eyes could handle.

Cruising up the mixed gravel and concrete road, Ted cranked his window open to let in a fresh flow of air, anything to help him stay alert. A half mile later he spotted a dark paneled building come into view on his right, partially hidden behind a huge oak. A misty yellow glow radiated from its windows, bringing a dim visibility to the midnight air.

His headlights shined on a large wooden post beside the road that read: Sham's Antiques & Deli. Then to his muted delight he saw the small neon sign on one of its windows proclaiming to all the world that Sham's was "Open."

"Whoopee," he grumbled, "might as well get a bite to eat before knocking off for a few winks." He yanked the wheel to the right, pulled into the stony lot and parked. Only one other vehicle shared the lot with him: an old Plymouth Duster, a remnant from the early 1970s, replete with a faded twister logo on its side and a two-toned green paint job. Judging from its flattened rear tire and crusty windows it had been sitting there for some time.

A soft jingle rang above the doorway as Ted entered, rousing the attention of an older gentleman who was leaning behind the counter. The old guy rendered Ted a smile as he said, "Good evening."

"Yeah, hi. Does this place have a restroom?"

"Of course," the old man smiled, "right over there," and pointed his index finger to the far wall past a few card racks. The man's finger caught Ted's attention; it seemed oddly long and narrow. Must be seven inches! Ted mused.

"Thanks," he said while lumbering through the room on the way to relieve himself.

Returning a few minutes later he took in the sights the store had to offer, mostly trinket and snack displays. The small deli case caught his attention, surprised by its meager variety of lunchmeats and cheeses. Then he noticed an adjoining room to his right, separated from the main area by wooden columns reaching from the dusty floor all the way to the ceiling. Behind the columns were a dozen or so antique furniture pieces, the age and value of which were beyond him, though he was pretty sure they could fetch a few bucks; they looked in perfect condition.

"Could I have a sandwich and a coke?" Ted asked as he stepped up to the deli case. "Just boiled ham and American cheese on rye, will do." He added, "Lots 'a mayo and lettuce."

The old gentleman moved to the counter to prepare the sandwich. "Please take a look around," he said. "I'll bring the sandwich to you." Pulling the ham from the case, he smiled humbly. "We don't get much business. When we do I like to show the place off."

Ted grunted his appreciation, "Sure."

Casually scanning over the card and trinket racks he decided to check out some of the antique furniture pieces.

Strangely, the lighting in that part of the store was pitifully obscure. Most furniture stores generously douse their exhibits with illumination to show things off. This place, however, offered only a few dim bulbs mounted on ceiling brackets to highlight their merchandize.

No wonder they don't get any business, Ted thought, this place is the pits. He wanted to tell the old geezer to buy more lights to brighten the place up, but restrained himself.

"Here's your sandwich and soda." Ted was startled as the old guy tapped him on his shoulder from behind.

"Thanks," Ted answered as he took the food.

The man extended his right hand over the room and asked, "What do you think of our little store?"

Instead of glancing over the furnishings Ted found himself suddenly taken in by the old man's eyes; they seemed rather large and bulbous, a hyperthyroid problem, no doubt.

"Yeah," Ted said, finally shifting his focus to the furniture. "Looks pretty good. Lots of old stuff and in mint condition." He took a first bite from his sandwich. "Hmmm. Good."

"Thank you," the old man returned. Glancing to his left, he said, "We're especially proud of our rocking chair built-for-two over there. It's my favorite." He pointed to the corner where a large,

expansive antique rocking chair sat. The chair was designed to seat two comfortably, with a contoured armrest in its center.

Ted couldn't recall ever seeing a rocking chair this big or this beautiful. The wood was intricately carved and shaped, the end product of a seasoned hand with precision tools. Its armrests reached out offering plenty of room and then curved inward to fully encapsulate its occupant with warmth and security. Light pine seemed to be the wood from which the chair was cut, but even that didn't seem quite right. The wood was more remarkable, more textured than any he had ever seen. The grain almost resembled veins as they swerved through the contour of the chair, twisting and bending with the natural lay of the wood. Whoever had sculpted these chairs was a master craftsman.

"Have a seat," the old man coaxed with a smile, pointing his protruding fingers toward the left side of the rocking chair. "Take a rest for a few minutes, will you? You'll enjoy it."

Though Ted did not want to spend any more time in here than necessary, he was not exactly in a hurry. His plan was to take a short nap and then get back on the road. But still, the chair did look inviting, almost seductive, and he was tired. Besides, if he liked it enough and it wasn't too pricey, he might even buy it. Just throw it in the back of the truck.

"Sure," he finally said as he stepped over to cozy himself into it. He oozed his rump down feeling a perfect fit. Laying his arms over the armrests, he relaxed, feeling the tenseness of his long ride slowly evaporate, his muscles loosening. He rested his head back, taking in all the comfort the chair had to give.

"Oh, this is nice," he sighed while gradually rocking the chair in a back and forth motion, slow and easy. "Ahhhh." He closed his eyes for a moment.

"So tell me," the old man inquired, "are you traveling alone?"

Ted could hardly retrieve his attention long enough to answer. He pulled his eyelids open. "Yeah. Just riding north to visit my brother for the weekend."

"I see."

Ted allowed his eyelids to slowly melt back down. Sighing in a relaxed breath he rocked, losing himself in the motion. The rocking continued, listless, effortless, his breathing began to move in synch with the rocking, slowing exhaling as it rolled back, inhaling as it cradled forward, the motion soft as air.

The old man stood contentedly watching, while underneath, an excitement welled up; a thirsty, almost longing gaze filling his large round eyes. Slowly he reached out to touch the arm of the chair, briefly turning to look over his shoulder. His hand hovered an inch from where Ted's arm rested. Satisfied that he was alone, he gently laid his long fingers onto the wooden surface and let them lay there as the chair continued gently rocking. When his hand touched the wood, Ted's body jerked slightly. The old guy seemed not to notice as he caressed the wood, gently stroking his fingers over it.

Realizing he was getting ahead of himself, he pulled his hand away and breathed out a deep sigh. Finally, after a moment of introspection, he walked to the front of the store near the bay window and waived slowly. A moment passed before the front door began opening with a creak until several old men, tired and pale, quietly marched through. First one, then two, then more, until nine men had entered, all of them carrying that same wanting expression, eager to get whatever it was the storeowner had for them.

The sudden intrusion woke Ted. Strangely, it seemed almost a Herculean effort just to open his eyes. "Who are they?" he asked in a sleepy voice, struggling to fully awaken. He tried forcing himself up out

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[**The Man Who Saved Christmas**](#)

Christmas—only days away; plastic snowmen and glowing reindeer adorn the lawns of neighborhoods all across America. All is calm, all is bright, and yet there is something tragically wrong about this Christmas night. With swift passage through Congress, the Anti-Intolerance legislation was signed into law prohibiting the public display of religious symbols. The traditional centerpiece enjoyed by millions every Christmas, the Nativity Scene, is now gone. This is one of those perennial issues that often stir emotions to the brink. But taking a lighter approach to the argument, wouldn't it be fun if, somehow, through some bizarre chain of events, the person who most fervently opposes open displays of religion, became the mouthpiece from which a fictitious law like the Anti-Intolerance bill, was overturned? This story brings to life a witty rendition of the political struggles fought every December over something as humble and yet powerful as the display of the Nativity Scene.

[**Chronicles of the HEDGE**](#)

Get ready to shudder! Starting with the first page of Jeff Ovall's futurist work of fiction, you'll start to look over your shoulder. His story peers into the history of a world not yet realized, yet ominously closer than most could imagine. A time in which the past has been reborn and humankind, in all its glory and misery, has finally reached the very edge of human history.

“... an incredible read that took me on a journey into a dark world where people of faith are condemned for their Christian convictions. Aside from keeping you awake at night, this book will make you thank God for your religious freedom!”

Jim Woodall
Former CEO, Concerned
Women for America (CWA)

“In an era when the worldwide persecution of the church is on the rise ... this work reminds us that

the decision to follow Jesus is the most important one we will ever make ... I encourage you to read this book!"

Timothy J. Demy, Th.D.
Theologian and author

"Jeff O'vall paints a convincing story of future possibilities. A world dominated by man's need to serve self and to control the masses into an ideology from the very Pit itself. CHRONICLES OF THE HEDGE is a gripping story of hope in the middle of darkness and the struggle of men and women brave enough to challenge a world gone mad. The darker the world gets, the greater the Light will shine in that darkness."

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