

## **Mamie's Hogan**

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Destination Nowhere**

Rocks flew and sprinkled deep into the yellow dust as the old car pulled off the highway and onto the shoulder. Jean looked through the dirty windshield into the dry landscape with her mouth tight, her eyes narrowed.

Turning off the engine, she slumped in the worn seat. The car wouldn't make it, but she had known that when she started out. As long as it would take her far enough away from what she had considered her home so that some of her past could dissipate like the powdery dust settling outside, it would be enough.

Nothing had rattled or broken loose to warrant the sudden need to stop the car. It was she who needed to stop; to try and focus on her life instead of the road. Not that the road needed much focusing, it was straight and monotonous.

Even the noon day's heat didn't bother her as she sat staring ahead over the wheel. She felt numb. She wasn't mad or hurt, maybe just disappointed in a failed marriage and also in herself. She felt as though she hadn't done much thinking about the man she had chosen for a husband. It had all been

surface; looks and laughter, none of the real things people try to find while choosing a partner. Maybe it was because she hadn't known what to look for. Certainly she hadn't wanted a marriage like that of her parents.

It could have been, she thought, that she hadn't known that she had had a choice. She was fast in putting the blame back on herself because Jean didn't feel like any kind of a prize: she was not well educated, plain in looks, and didn't feel as though she had a winning personality. She asked herself what she had brought to the marriage. Her answer was that she was conscientious, hard working, responsible, punctual and willing. All those things should have amounted to something, but apparently didn't do anything to enrich her life or enhance her marriage; they were all attributes of employment. So, what had she brought to her marriage? She had brought nothing. She wasn't a loving person. She'd had no background in that. Being frigid didn't add anything to the marriage. Jean felt guilty that she hadn't told her husband about that. As it turned out, it wouldn't have mattered. Not only would he not have understood, but nothing would have come of sharing the information with him. The marriage had all been just a tremendous workout.

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She looked at her thin, pale arms and noticed she was still gripping the steering wheel but didn't seem to be able to let it go. She looked down at her long legs which protruded from the faded shorts. Her white knees seemed like bony points facing out in opposite directions.

Reluctantly, she let go of the wheel and tilted the rearview mirror so she could see her face. Gray eyes looked back at her from a serious face. She turned slowly from side to side. Mediocre, that was the word she felt described her face. She wasn't old looking, but neither was she young. You're as young as you feel, she told the mirror.

"God, I feel old!" she said aloud.

Light, sandy-blond hair had been pulled back on either side of her face with large black bobby pins. The pins had been found in the jumbled glove compartment in her frantic search for something to keep the wind from stinging her face as her hair whipped around her head. There was an air conditioner, but Jean had tried it and nothing had happened except more hot air being trapped inside with the windows closed.

Two cars whizzed by. The last one stepped on the brakes. She saw the lights brighten momentarily before the driver had had second thoughts. She decided to move on before

someone actually stopped to offer help. She needed help all right, but not with the car, well at least, not yet. She pulled onto the road and speeded up finally enjoying the mere feeling of the car's movement and that it was still carrying her away.

Even though she was driving fast, cars passed seeming to be going at such a speed that she was sure she'd never be able to keep her own car on the road driving like that. She was so preoccupied, it was all she could do to stay in her lane and not be a danger to anyone. Her thoughts consumed her; weighting her down.

After graduating from high school, Jean had met a handsome Mexican with a flashing smile and beautiful, white teeth. He worked at a fruit-packing company in town. She was infatuated. A few dates and he'd talked her into having sex with him. She had enjoyed the kisses but when the sex was over, she lay there wondering what had happened. Why didn't she seem to get any fulfillment from the act? In spite of all their dates, she never got an answer to that question. Jean never said no to him, and was really sorry she hadn't when she missed her period.

She was even sorrier when she told him and he stopped coming around. Her heart was broken but there was no one to

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turn to for comfort, and getting pregnant without being married was sinful. That, she had learned from the Catholic Church which she had joined to make her Mexican boyfriend happy. Jean actually didn't see that it made a difference to his happiness. Probably she did it more to be accepted by his family. The only Catholic part about her boy friend was that, he explained, he couldn't wear a condom because it was against his religion.

So, there she was like a million other girls; suddenly realizing they were ignorant and a soft touch for anyone who showed them any affection and pregnant!

She cried all day, privately in the bathroom, or while hanging up clothes. She cried all night with her head beneath the covers so her younger sisters, sharing the same bedroom, wouldn't hear. But, they did hear and it made them sad. They had lived too long without compassion themselves to know how to give it so they didn't do anything.

Jean finally went to the clinic in a neighboring town and got an abortion. So much for being "sexually active"; as she had heard herself being described to another nurse in an outer room.



Sexually active? What a joke. She had acted out a frenzy which she hadn't felt and lied later about how great the sex was. The whole thing was as false and hallow as her life had been. What do I know about love, she'd asked herself; all she'd felt was an emptiness.

Then she met Jack and they married.

They went on and they went on, trying to make their marriage work. As she thought back about it, she wondered why. They were husband and wife in name only and they weren't even friends.

She had been twenty when she married him twelve years ago. They never had children and she didn't know if that would have made a difference or not. Neither of them had been overly affectionate. Actually, it would have been rough on a child growing up with them.

And in the sexual department, Jean had finally found a name that fit; she was frigid. She always wondered what all the fuss was about, not having experienced any sensation during sex. It was a big disappointment when she learned from articles in magazines that there really was something that she should have been feeling but it just wasn't there.

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Jean came from a large family, one in which there hadn't been any expressions of love. She couldn't remember anyone ever telling her they loved her. She felt like a weed growing up. Jean didn't even know how she looked. Compared to other girls at school her features were better and her shape was better, but she didn't feel pretty. Her clothes were "hand-me-downs" and nothing to ever feel proud about. As a result of all this, she never joined in the clubs or events at their small high school. Jean had been asked once to be a cheerleader and declined before even thinking about it. It had scared her so much to think she'd have to compete with the popular girls. As far as trying to get money for a uniform, it would have been completely out of the question. Her mother and father both worked, but they just skimmed by.

Now, here she was, divorced. It had been a mutual consent. No big deal. He went his way; she went hers. There was no community property. They had just squeaked by, much like her parents. Only, she and Jack hadn't had any children, so where had the money gone? She thought back about a driveway filled with many cars. They had rented a house because they never could save enough money to put down on one. But, they had purchased beautiful new cars and heavy-

duty trucks, some of which were repossessed when they couldn't pay for them. Cars and trucks weren't her bag, why she wondered, had she gone along with all that?

The car she ended up with, an old station wagon with fake wood sides, was comfortable to drive and so big that it got about twelve miles to the gallon. When the gas ran out, or when the money ran out, or when the car quit working, she'd stay wherever she landed. She just didn't give a damn!

She'd said goodbye to her mother who was genuinely sorry that Jean's marriage hadn't worked out. She had had to force a smile to keep from crying when she said goodbye to her two sisters whom she really cared about and who were still living at home. Then she left, heading east from California.

Someplace in New Mexico, the car died. Jean had talked to an old guy who owned a dilapidated body shop piled high with dusty parts but close in to town and asked if she could park along the side of his building until she figured out what she was going to do. If he ever thought she'd fix the old clonker, he was badly mistaken but she needed a home base: she needed someplace she could come back to every night after

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looking for work. The car was loaded with her clothes and things so she locked it and headed out.

It wasn't a large town but it seemed to be because the arroyos, running down from the hills on either side, confined the building area to being long and stretched out. All the businesses were on either side of the main highway hemmed in by the ditches; there wasn't much room for regular city blocks since the ground dropped away so sharply. The land was rugged and bare; a most uninviting place but Jean didn't mind, she was in limbo to beauty, or living, or enjoyment. She was just interested in feeding herself and finally getting a place to stay besides the car which she went back to every day.

Jean applied for a job at a small cafe. The manager looked her over. She could have been pretty but was tall and thin with long, stringy blonde hair. She had a sort of dirty look, no not dirty, more like a dusty look. She'd have to take care of that right away he told her when he hired her.

Jean worked with two other women who were about her age. When they found out she was sleeping in her car, they offered her a place with them for a third of the rent and expenses. They weren't the kind of people Jean liked in particular but this was a notch better than what she had going

for her. And again, Jean really didn't care much anymore. She wasn't out to make friends; just eating and sleeping and getting cleaned up were her priorities.

Flo, a tough wannabe red-head and Jackie who followed in her footsteps, had friends over both night and day. They gave Jean a small bedroom at the back of the house and were glad that she preferred to stay back there and read when their boyfriends came over. Too many times the boyfriends tried to get her to come out and join them. "Have a beer. Relax," they laughed while eyeing her up and down. Both Flo and Jackie were happy to describe Jean as a snobby bitch to discourage their interest in her. The women made her sound bad enough that if she came out she'd put a damper on everyone's fun. To Jean's relief, the men finally gave up trying.

Flo was at work and Jean and Jackie were having lunch when a friend of Jackie's came by. He had another man with him whom Jackie began to flirt with immediately. The men weren't in the mood for partying; they had business to take care of. Jackie hadn't made any headway with the new guy and was put out because of it. Slamming out of the kitchen, she called back, "Jean'll have to entertain you. I gotta work. It's her day off."

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The men looked at each other and then at Jean. "You know, you could really help us out today," Jackie's friend said. He told her about a business venture they were starting and how difficult it was since their car was giving them trouble. Jean felt relieved. She had dreaded being alone with the men and agreed to help them when they told her that all she had to do was to keep the car's motor running while they went to see about delivering some parts. If the motor died, they said, they'd have to look for somebody to jump-start the car and the guy would get somebody else to make the delivery. They reminded her of how hard it was to get a job, any job, and they wanted to start a business of their own.

Jean stood, eager to get them out of the house and get the job done. She didn't like any of Jackie's friends and especially this one. He'd whisper things in her ear every chance he got and would try and grab her hand to put it on his crotch. He couldn't quite get his mind beyond the bulge in his pants. He was what Jean called "short sighted."

The men left the house nudging one another and laughing. One of them called into the house for Jean when the car was started and she ran out to help. She slid in on the driver's side putting her foot on part of the gas pedal where it

was being held down by the man on the passenger's side until he slid his foot off.

"Now, just keep it going!" he yelled as he got out, "and don't goose it, or it'll stall."

The two men met behind the car and talked a minute before getting in. Jean drove them to the part of town that had a cluster of businesses: a bank, a real estate, another restaurant, etc.. She stopped where they told her behind a row of hedges near a park just off the main street. This would let her sit in the shade, they said, until they could sign their agreement for the delivery and pick up the parts to be delivered.

There was no shade and the sun beat down on Jean who gently held the gas pedal just so. The shade was on the other side of the hedge. It made her upset to have let them say that and get away with it when she was in the full sun. She just wanted to get it over with and get back to the house. Jean was thinking of looking for another place to live. It was too easy just letting things happen. She didn't need to live there with those two tramps. The forty dollars the old man at the garage had given her for the car was missing. At that rate, she'd never save any money. So deep in thought was she that she jumped when a head and shoulder poked its way in the window. She

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gasped and almost took her foot off the throttle. When she saw a gun pointed at her, she felt faint.

The policeman's close face managed a smile as he snarled, "All right girlie! Out!"

"I can't, I've got to keep the engine running or it'll die," Jean was almost crying she was so afraid.

"Out!" yelled the cop and waved the gun back and forth.

She opened the door and slid out keeping her foot on the gas pedal for as long as she could. Jean was a responsible person. It was ingrained in her to not let people down and the job had meant a lot to the two men but this was serious. She tried to think of what the police could want.

She removed her foot from the pedal and did a double-take when the motor kept on running. The policeman grunted, grabbed the top of her arm and pulled her from the car.

"They won't need it running anymore," he sneered reaching in to turn the car off.

Jean asked what was happening, but was pushed into the back of a police car where the two men sat crouched together glaring.

Jackie's friend sneered out a laugh and said loudly, "You were doin' a good job, Jean, too bad we didn't make it,"



his eyes slid to the other man and he muttered, “That’ll fix the stuck-up bitch!”

Jean tried to protest, she tried to move away, she was caught next to the two men and she was caught in a situation that she knew she wasn’t going to get out of. And Flo and Jackie would find the rest of the money she’d hidden and they wouldn’t help at all. And worse, she felt like the dumbest damn fool in the world!

Things moved fast and Jean was on her way to being locked up before she knew what was happening. How could she protest that she had not been in on what she found out was an attempted bank robbery when she had sat there with her foot on the gas waiting for the two men? And what they had said about Jean being in on it held more weight than her feeble explanations of how she happened to be there.

Now in a busy area which was the hub of the building separating the Men’s and Women’s Facility and not too far from town, Jean sat on a cushioned bench about thirty feet away from where the police gathered at a circular counter in the middle of the room. She listened to their boisterous laughing and joking. To the right of where she sat was a solid, outside

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wall broken by a water cooler and vending machines protruding into the room before leading down a wide hall to other offices. To the left of that and opposite the circular counter were glass double-doors. From her angle she could see through them into a courtyard with a set of the same kind of doors going into another building to the left. She had been asked to wait on the bench until an officer came to take her across the courtyard to the women's area. Jean hadn't been handcuffed. She wondered if she could just casually walk outside and leave without anyone noticing until a buzzer sounded startling her and a door popped open. She realized that all the doors were on some kind of system operated by one of the jolly officers behind the counter.

The buzzer sounded again and she looked up to see a straight-faced officer standing in front of her flicking papers on a clipboard, keys bunched in his hand. He had that pinched, preoccupied stare as though his shoes were too tight. He motioned for her to follow him and didn't look back to see if she did. As he walked, he lifted a leg slightly and farted. Jean hesitated; then went on. She saw that she was in a new category now and beneath the contempt of the people she'd be in contact with.

The officer grumbled, “Door, Bob!” when they passed the noisy counter as they headed to the courtyard.

Bob, at the counter, reached down and flipped the switch without breaking the rhythm of the joke he was telling. The buzzer sounded, the officer went through the doors and so did Jean. Without hesitating, Jean went off to the right along the wall while the officer headed for the glass double doors on the left fumbling with his bunch of keys.

In quick strides, Jean kept to the cement block wall and squeezed into a depression almost filled by a huge, gray electrical box with pipes running from the back directly through the walls to the inside of the building. Without a thought, Jean began to climb the pipes like she would a ladder; her knees were barely able to bend to make the next rung. Some pipes were hot, some cold, but she didn’t linger long enough for them to be a problem. When she reached the top, she inched herself between the overhang of the roof and the top of the cement block wall running around the courtyard and squeezed over it. Hanging by her fingers on the outside, she looked down. It was a good ten feet to the hard-packed clay below and from there, another four or five feet over to the arroyo running along the length of the wall. No telling how far the drop was to the

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bottom of the large ditch from there but she wasn't going to be able to hang on much longer.

Jean let go and hit the ground on her feet falling forward onto her knees, hip and shoulder and just kept on rolling until she went over the side and into the arroyo. She tumbled another twelve feet down its sloped side and landed in soft sand at the bottom.

In the courtyard, the officer had fumbled and flickered his keys around his clipboard and finally gotten the doors open, then looked back. She wasn't there. He whirled around afraid; thinking she was standing behind him and was almost relieved that she wasn't there. Then he headed back across the yard to the double doors he'd exited thinking that the dumb woman hadn't followed him out. It put him in a bad position with the other men and he'd be the butt of their jokes, again. He banged on the glass, but no one was paying attention; they were roaring and shouting over at the counter. He finally banged his clipboard against the glass and they looked over with contempt. The buzzer sounded and he shot inside with his head turning from side to side. The other officers stood watching him.

“Where is she?” he demanded, as though they’d played a joke on him.

“Where the hell’s who?” came back from the other side of the counter.

“You know, that woman who was supposed to follow me out!” this got everyone’s attention. He might be a jack-ass, but it was their facility and it would reflect badly on everyone to lose a prisoner - especially a woman!

They branched out. Some went outside and looked around the electrical box, but decided it was too small to have squeezed into and the wall was ten feet high, besides, the officer had said that the woman didn’t go through the door with him so they spent most of their time searching inside.

When Jean realized she was all right after her fall, she wasted no time scrambling to her feet. She ran closest to the side of the arroyo under the courtyard wall and in a direction away from the town. She watched for snakes and boulders as she ran clumsily through the soft sand; every minute would count. She knew that if the police ran outside the facility and looked in the arroyo, they’d see her even though there were

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twists and turns. Over the sound of her heart beating, she strained to hear if there were any sounds from above. The grounds of the jail had followed fairly close to the arroyo on this side and had a dead end road running along on the other with a turn around at the end. There weren't many places to look for her. She was surprised it was taking so long to have someone spot her.

She rounded a bend and ran into a place that someone had used for a garbage dump. The side of the arroyo had been worn away from so many things being thrown into the ditch. Jean started to climb out; then looked back. Among the debris, there was a black, plastic garbage bag with its side split open and a blanket sticking out. She jumped down and pulled out the worn, flowered, yellow and white blanket. Along with it was an old sweater attached by a blob of white plaster. Jean gathered the things and looked back towards the prints she had made on her attempt at going up the slope. Turning, she ran on in the arroyo placing her feet on as many of the discarded items as possible like stepping stones. If they followed the trail going up out of the garbage site, she might gain some time.

She ran and ran picturing them watching her from the top of the rim. She ran even faster knowing that she wouldn't

have the freedom to run or do anything for a long time when caught.

The ditch started on an upward slant and at a point that wasn't too difficult, Jean groped and panted crawling out of it and away toward a small hill. The hill was bare except for stunted-looking round, pine trees. She scampered from tree to tree staying in their shadow and always on an upward movement until she reached the top. From there, she could see the town, the facility, the arroyo she had followed, and a tiny, black police car over near where she thought the dump had been.

This was as far as Jean could make it without rest. Her legs shook from the exertion. She hung onto a branch of one of the trees as the sky began to change colors and streaks of sunlight crossed the rolling hills making the long shadows longer.

Jean couldn't take another step. The tree was her only hope for cover and safety during the night. She crunched down with her foot on the white plaster that pinned the blanket and the sweater together breaking them apart and put on the old sweater. She threw the blanket into the tree worrying about its bright colors being seen and pulled herself up. It wasn't

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difficult climbing the low, round tree, but it was difficult to find a comfortable position on its branches for the night. She thought about her old car and what luxury it had been compared to this. By squirming, bunching and breaking branches, she finally had something close to a nest. She tugged at the blanket wrapping it around her.

Jean was surprised at how cold it got at night. She'd had her sleeping bag in the car, and windows that would roll up, but there were times she'd been cold even then. But this! Every place the blanket didn't cover was like ice. She was constantly poking at the blanket trying to fill in those places.