

THE NOGAL JOURNALS

Volume Twenty-two

**BELLE, THUNDER, SPANKY
AND
MATTHEW MIDGETT**

“You're bringing so much light into the world through your horses, cats, other animals -- and your own generous heart. Thanks for doing this wonderful service to us all... so much love you send!”

Gail Raborn



Come along and ride with us!

THE NOGAL JOURNALS

Volume XXII

Part 3 of 3

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for your active TABLE OF CONTENTS
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2021-07-17 - Stormy Skies

Monsoon skies continue.

Most afternoons, dramatic cumulonimbus clouds form.



We know that rain may be on the way.



Russian sage likes this time of year.



Although skies were darkening, we thought we might have time for a ride behind the house before the rain began.



"Hurry up!", urges Thunder on the way to the forest gate.



Hmmm . . . better keep an eye on that big dark cloud.



2021-07-17 - Stormy Skies

Before long, lightning began to strike in the distance, and we headed home (you can just make out a strike about 10 miles away in this shot).



Okay, guys - back to the barn!



We don't mess with lightning.

MM

2021-07-19 - Meadows

During much of the year, this is dry country. But in the summer, fields and ranchlands turn into green meadows - it is a real treat.

Everywhere we look, Nature's bounty . . .



Of course, Belle is in heaven.



Actually, we all are.



Uh-huh.



Along a stream, an equine's salad bar.



Everyone is allowed to lag a bit in the meadows . . .



. . . but they are good about catching up.



This is not a time or place to rush.



Even the water seems to flow more leisurely.



Flowers bloom lazily in the shade . . .



... and our pace is slower.



Summertime.



MM

2021-07-21 - A Clear Space

Even during monsoon season, it doesn't rain every day - and on those days when it rains, it's typically only for an hour or so. Usually there are 'clear spots' nearby, where the clouds' part and allow for dry and sunny riding.

It looked pretty ominous in most directions, but beyond our driveway there seemed to be an opening in the clouds to the east.



2021-07-21 - A Clear Space

We headed for the blue sky.



Hmmm . . . so far, so good!



2021-07-21 - A Clear Space

Of course, we never know . . . so we kept our fingers crossed as we began our ride (that is just a figure of speech, as horses of course have no fingers. "Very funny. But then, you only have two legs!", Belle retorts).



Looking beyond the trailer, it's still cloudy at home.



The skies over us were sure dramatic.



Looking up, Thunder takes a snack break - just in case we have to cut our ride short.



Here he comes.



The big clouds stretching towards us have a 'wow' factor - hovering low, like giant dirigibles.



Belle takes in the view from a rise. She spots something interesting . . .



A little brook in the distance, which only runs this time of year.



2021-07-21 - A Clear Space

Against a mountainous background, the boys are more interested in chowing down.



Looking back in the direction of home, rain is coming down - like a curtain being drawn over the view.



2021-07-21 - A Clear Space

We wait it out, and by the time we got home the rain was over. Belle enjoys a pre-supper snack. "Why do you always photograph me when I'm eating? Well, because . . ."



MM

Fort Stanton was established by the US Army, in 1855. It was one of the country's most remote posts and retains much of that isolation today - being surrounded by 25,000 acres of undeveloped land administered by the Bureau of Land Management.



Over the years, the horses have spent a lot of time on the historic parade ground.



Spanky is comfortable making his grass angels here. "Whee!"



They all know that the sweetest clover grows near the grand veranda.



We also enjoy more obscure areas - such as these nearly forgotten stables . . .



. . . and the Fort's old water tank, recently replaced with a freshly-painted modern one.



This is the former silting pond, part of an obsolete filtration system.



The original cavalry-era cemetery (also dating from 1855) sits high above the Fort and is seldom visited.



It affords spectacular views of the distant Fort . . .



. . . and the newer New Mexico State Veterans Cemetery.



2021-07-23 - The Fort

While we were riding in the back country, a real thrill - a heavy military-type propeller plane spotted us, turned, and did a low fly-over! The horses took it in stride.



They huddled to talk about it. "Boy, that thing was loud!" "Yeah. I wonder what it would be like to fly in one of those!" "I don't think you would like it."



We chose one of the many trails surrounding the Fort (there are nearly 100 miles of them).



Meadows of greenery this time of year.



Bisected here and there by rain-muddied water.



There are rocky arroyos and dry washes, too. Thunder and Spanky negotiate a steep trail.



Back onto the green . . .



. . . and the shoreline grass they love so much.



It was a long ride, and the boys slow down on the way back to the trailer.



Maybe they were just taking time to enjoy the beautiful day.



Thank you for joining us!
MM

As we were passing the rodeo arena in Capitan, I heard Thunder tell the other two that the new sand mixture on the ground "Is amazing. They say it is so soft and nice . ." I know a hint when I hear one.

They couldn't wait to try it out.



A sand angels test. "Ah . . . this stuff's great!"



2021-07-26 - Arena Play

Even Belle, who normally is more dignified, let loose.



She challenged the boys to races (ever the gentlemen, Spanky seemed to hang back).



Despite her . . . 'voluptuousness', she surprised them. Go, Belle!



"Gurl power!"



They all had a ball.



Look at Spanky go!





All four feet off the ground!



2021-07-26 - Arena Play

Belle tried it, her way . . . "See? All four of my feet are off the ground, too! Ha! Ha! Whee!"



Then it was time for some mellow riding on the adjacent ranch. "Hey, I'm feeling my zen . . ."



"Who's that over there?", wondered Belle.



It was a really big pronghorn, checking us out.



"This is great, too!"



Then, after the sun had set - something special.



A big herd of elk, out for their supper.



MM

2021-07-28 - Monsoon Madness

In New Mexico, monsoon rain can vary from English-countryside-drizzle to something resembling the inside of a dishwasher on the pots & pans cycle. This year it's been exceptionally generous.

Most mornings start out nice and dry.



As clouds build, the bronze lion looks like he knows what is coming, snarling at the clouds.



2021-07-28 - Monsoon Madness

Yup. Just a few minutes later - this is heavy rain. The horses are glad to be in the barn!



A really, really heavy rain. Water begins to flow down normally dry Cherry Creek.



2021-07-28 - Monsoon Madness

As water from the mountains rushes down (the ground is already saturated), it becomes a torrent.



It's a good thing the old-timers knew to put buildings above flood level.



Little Chile cat keeps an eye on it, to make sure. After all, it's his barn.



"I don't like swimming . . ."



The surge passes by the old well and water tank without issue . . .



. . . and crosses the driveway, remarkably without damage.



It continues down the natural drainage away from the ranch.



We can hear the roar of rushing water, even inside the house.



After a while, it ebbs to a more placid pace.



The ripening apples are grateful for the water. We all are.



Back to sunshine.



It happened again the following day - between the two storms, we received about 5" of rain. Feeling very fortunate.

MM

The monsoon season is still with us - and rain is still a possibility.
It's given us some mighty green hills (and lots of mowing!).



Although the afternoon began to cloud up, it was a very nice day, and we thought we would risk a ride at nearby Ranchman's Camp. "Remember my hair . . .", reminded Belle. They started with a quick snack.



Belle eyed the sky as we began our ride. "I don't know about this . . ."



Lush country right now.



With lots of little ponds and seeps like this one, which was full of polliwogs. Good thing ours is not a 'buggy' climate.



Spanky and Belle spot a bigger pond.



"The water's still muddy from the rain.", says Thunder as he passes by.



The reflections of the sky are cool.



On we go.



That's Nogal Peak in the distance . . .



. . . and Sierra Blanca over there . . . where it's raining.



Spanky takes in the view.



Hmmm . . . rain coming down, not too far away.



Then a little closer.



I think we should head back, guys. "Okay. Just a quick bite . . ."



Another shower, closer still.



We ran all the way back to the trailer - and just made it, before the rain reached us.



MM

With more rain, the green keeps getting greener . . . and now wildflowers we haven't seen in a long time are springing up.



It sure makes for beautiful trails . . . if we can find them among the new foliage.





"Which way?"



Happy trio.



New, young ponderosa pines begin to grow in a meadow.



Belle pauses to stare at a weird fluffy object in the grass (barely visible ahead on the left) - a skunk's upturned tail giving warning. She knew - smart girl.



Back at home - those monsoon clouds . . .



The driveway has recovered from recent heavy rains.



Thunder enjoys a fast run behind the house.



Back to Salado Pasture (part of the Fort Stanton BLM area).



New growth encroaches on the trails here, too. "There it is!"



Thunder always knows the way.



"See? I knew this stream was here!"



"Nice going, Thunder!"



To them, it's all a salad bar. "A bite here . . . a bite there . . ."



Spanky spots a pronghorn in the distance.



Something special. Oh, yes.



MM

Our timing of outings between rains has been pretty good.

A few clouds, but awfully nice out.



Hey, you guys want to go for a ride? A collective "DUH!!!"

(Hmmm . . . a few more clouds in that direction - better go the other way.)



A green valley ahead . . .



. . . and some pretty yellow flowers.



These are wild crested prickly poppies. Bees love them.



So far, so good. Lots of blue sky.



"It's sure pretty but are there more clouds than a minute ago?", muses Belle.



A drink along the stream. Gee, the water is kinda muddy-looking. Is there rain somewhere?



"Uh . . ."



"Look at the sky, now . . ."



"Come on, Belle, get a move on!"



Belle feels the first drops. "Damn! I was afraid of this! Grrrr!"



2021-08-04 - *Pushing Our Luck*

With rain pelting down, the boys take off towards the trailer, lickety-split. "Quick! . . ."



. . . but in a few minutes, it was over and the sun came out again.



Monsoon season in New Mexico . . .



MM

2021-08-06 - *Munching Along*

Rain is always welcome . . . but a break in the monsoon allows us to catch up on some chores.

Right now, you can practically watch the grass grow before your eyes. After a day of mowing, the horses let me know they wanted a late afternoon outing (I wanted to put my feet up, but . . .).



We could see Belle's ears perk up. "Look at THAT! Thank goodness no one's mowing here!"



2021-08-06 - *Munching Along*

It's hard for them to concentrate on the trail, when it's hidden - camouflaged by lots of new grass.



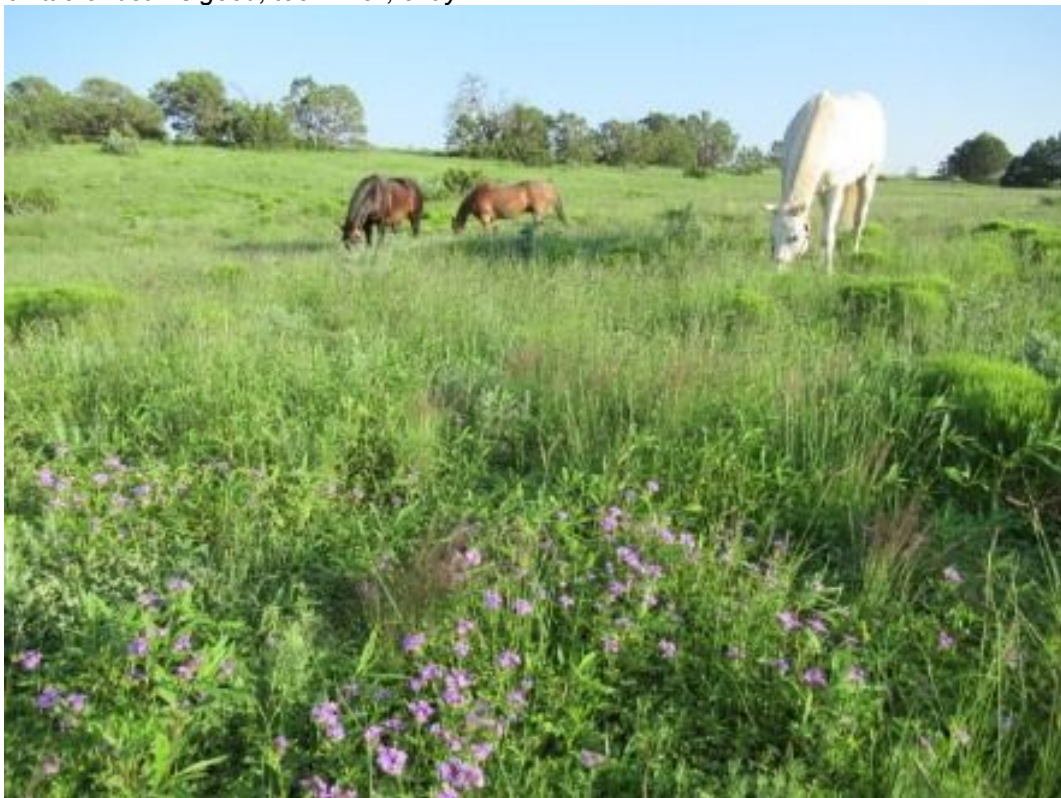
Come on Belle, let's move on. "Sigh . . ."



Thunder would rather go than eat . . .



. . . but a little of both is good, too. "Well, okay . . ."



New Mexico giant bonsai (yes, that is a contradiction . . .).



A couple of elk (an elk couple?) in the distance.



Every valley is an invitation . . .



The boys take their time (that's them, way back in the center of the photo).



Can't blame them. Here they come - munching along.



"What do you think, Belle?"



"I think I'll have some more."



"Good idea."



An Indian Paintbrush 'bouquet'.



Nature's arrangement.



Headed back (it's amazing they will move along through this feast).



Sunset snacks.



"Hey - that's NOT a flattering silhouette!!"



Okay, Belle, how about this one? "Much better!"



MM

"Billy the Kid's Last Escape", performed annually in Lincoln, NM, is possibly the nation's oldest live folk pageant. The show celebrated its 80th anniversary this past weekend.

"The Last Escape of Billy the Kid", by noted New Mexico painter Peter Hurd. Peter played Billy in the very first pageant (1940). The painting portrays Billy riding onto the eastern plains after having fled Lincoln during his escape from the courthouse on April 28th, 1881. He was dead just three months later, at the age of 21.



Photo courtesy Hurd Rinconada Gallery

Along with the Pageant, the Lincoln State Historical Site supports a three-day Old Lincoln Days event with activities such as living history performances, reenactments, and special speakers. Belle was invited to provide 'meet and greet' photo opportunities for visitors (with a gun tote'in outlaw on her back).



She's always a favorite of children . . .



And, well . . . everybody.



We encounter Billy and his gang during a peaceful moment.



Awww . . . an encounter of another kind.



Back home, her boys were waiting to greet her. "What an exciting day I've had!"



They raced along with the trailer, eager to hear all about her adventure.



The next day, she returned in her cavalry outfit to lead the annual Old Lincoln Days parade.



All sorts of Westerners participate.





I'm always proud of my girl.



After the parade, she posed patiently with the Lea County sheriff's color guard.



Her duties completed; she was happy to be back home again grazing peacefully with her boys under a lucky rainbow.



MM

2021-08-13 - *Predictably Unpredictable*

The most predictable thing about the monsoons is that they arrive here every summer (which is a blessing). Also, it's predictable that they are unpredictable. When monsoon clouds are around, we never know when (exactly) or where (exactly) it might rain. So, we just look up at the sky and make our best guess.

Well . . . looks kinda stormy over there - better go in the opposite direction!



Rains have really stimulated grass growth this year. "I know there used to be a trail here somewhere."



We take plenty of snack breaks on this ride.



Spanky enjoys some solitude.



Sort of . . . a big herd of elk watches us from a distance.



They pass by like a nomadic caravan.



Many of the juniper trees have this odd, bright green plant growing directly beneath them.



Belle and Spanky have a chat during their snacking. Thunder moves on.



It's time for him to have some 'space'.



Then he and Spanky have a little race across a grassy hillside.



Soon, they are all together again.



We're keeping our eyes on those clouds in the distance.



"Hmmm . . .", thinks Thunder.



"Maybe we should head this way."



So fortunate to have trustworthy horses, who respect their freedom.





Heavy rain over there now.



Better head home.



Grateful.
MM

After several days of rain, a big group of elk arrive here on a beautiful morning.
At dawn, a glorious morning sky.



'Cow pen' daisies brighten the pasture.



Our resident roadrunner was there to greet his elk friends - "Beep! Beep! . . . "



. . . and this magnificent deer buck, with his amazing angular antlers (still developing under their 'velvet' covering) joins in.



The elk . . .



Lots of elk.



With lots of babies.



This little one is intrigued by a reflector along the driveway. "What is it?", asks his friend. "I have no idea. Weird flower of some sort, I guess." "Don't eat it!" . . . Yeah, don't eat it . . .



... and please don't eat the daisies.



(They do).



"Munch, munch."



Speaking of eating - breakfast time with mom.



"Yum!"



That little one had an itch (a mourning dove watches all the activity from the fence. "This is fascinating.")



"Oh, oh, oh - I got it. Ahhhh."



Awww . . . a young couple in love. "Smoochy, smoochy."



"Good morning, snookums." . . . "Not now. He's taking photos!"



Another mom and spotted baby create a pastoral tableau in the deep, ripening grass.



"Aren't those horses ever going to get up?"



2021-08-15 - A Good Morning

Finally, they emerge from their 'clubhouse' barn for their breakfast. Good morning, lazybones.



2021-08-15 - A Good Morning

From inside the big barn, "X" marks the spot. It certainly does.



MM

This has been an exceptionally beautiful summer, and we have enjoyed our monsoon's bounty at home with great appreciation.

The lawns and pastures sure have benefited from all the rain . . .



. . . and riding in the forest land behind the house is an arcadian pleasure.



Only frequent use has kept our trails identifiable.



Still, in many places they have disappeared under the lush grass.





"I really don't mind", says a happy Spanky.





The horses know how fortunate they are.



"Yup. Really lucky."



This resting buck would agree.



MM

2021-08-21 - *Regeneration*

Every few years we are blessed with an exceptional monsoon season. As if to atone for scarcity and drought, Nature brings forth a beautiful regeneration.

This area often looks like a dry prairie - but not this summer.



In fact, trails are virtually hidden by the deep, lush growth.



2021-08-21 - Regeneration

Which gives us the chance to wander, bushwhacking over the rolling country. "Hmmm . . . maybe over there . . ."



Of course, they enjoy the bounty along the way. "Just a quick bite . . ."



2021-08-21 - *Regeneration*

*They weren't asked to pose like this. "Hey, Belle, you look really pretty today."
"Oh, thanks. I'm showing my good side to the camera. Wish he'd hurry up - I'm holding my tummy in."*



We all enjoy the splendor of this place and time.



Lots of wildflowers.



Belle in her bliss - "Now this is horse zen!"



Spanky finds his own contentment.



"This is so cool!"



"What'd you find over there, Belle?"



"I'm not sure. There's some stuff this year I've never tasted!"





Grateful.



MM

2021-08-22 - Magic Mountain

Our summer has begun to peak. Before long, the brilliant green mountains will begin to dim as the grasses put forth their tawny seed heads. It's a very special time, as though Nature is holding its breath before gradually moving into another season.

It still looks 'spring-like' on the drive up the mountain.



Out their trailer windows, the horses admire the green grass with anticipation.



Along the trail, the forest is still lush with summer grass.



Happy boy.



"Whaddaya mean, 'Enjoy it while you can because winter is coming'? I'm staying in the moment!"



Wildflowers are in abundance.



These things remind us of shamrocks.



This buck seems unconcerned with our passing (maybe he's seen us before).



Now we begin the final ascent into the high country.



Ah . . . one of our favorite places.



They settle in for a mountain snack.



2021-08-22 - *Magic Mountain*

Spanky remarks about all the green - even in the desert valley, far below. "Wow."



We traverse flower-strewn high ridges.





Spanky and Thunder lag behind for "just one more bite".



2021-08-22 - Magic Mountain

Spanky is the last to catch up. "Hmmm . . . I wonder what we will find up here . . . "



Our magic mountain.



Each meadow is special to us.



Time to head back down.



A cool drink in the gathering dusk.





MM

2021-08-23 - More Monsoon

Our days are still dominated by the monsoon weather. This summer, if you want to get something done outdoors, it's best to be finished before noon. Even then, there is a risk of an unexpected downpour.

All that rain means lots of effort to control grass growth (mowing), so it doesn't get out of hand.





Monsoon clouds can form with remarkable speed. The horses were grazing photogenically in the east pasture when I went for the camera to capture a pastoral moment. By the time I came back, they had vanished - they knew what was coming.



2021-08-23 - More Monsoon

A classic dark monsoon cloud was forming rapidly over the barn (where the horses had gone for protection).



The rain began while sun was still shining on us.





Soon that cloud had grown to cover the sky. Temperatures can drop 10 degrees in a flash . . .



. . . and the rain came down (the horses are smart - they're snug inside the barn).



When it was over - calm, dry and beautiful once more . . . until the next time.



MM

This time of year, the big bull elk hang out together in the high country, while the moms and babies enjoy all the grass at the ranch.

Waiting for his friends, Thunder grazes next to some daisies.



Around dusk, the elk arrive to join in.



A spotted calf with his mom.



They all hang out together. The horses are good hosts. "Please help yourselves!"



Another mom and baby chow down on some nutritious grama grass.



Mom takes a rest. "This kid just wears me out!"



Suddenly, Spanky realizes the elk have arrived.



"I was at the barn and didn't know they were here already. Gotta say Hi!"



"How's everybody doing?"



Three more babies.



Mom waits patiently as her baby nurses.



Fences aren't much of a challenge for these high jumpers.



Here come some more. "Oh, look - a party!"



"Glad we have plenty of grass for everyone!", says Belle.





After a while, they mosey up the knoll above the 'clubhouse' barn.





This gangly little guy is curious. "What is this place?"



Nap time. The ones lying down look like they are floating in the deep grass.



MM

2021-08-27 - *Within a Village*

The elk have been hanging out here at the ranch - it's like we are part of their 'village'.
There have been around 80 of them.



Like most wildlife, elk are curious by nature - and seem to enjoy checking things out.



"Wow - those flowers are pretty!"



They like to socialize. "I think the last time I saw you was . . ."



Some of them congregate on the grass below the house (note the little one snoozing in the foreground).



He still has his 'baby' spots.



He's joined by several others . . .



. . . who think a siesta is a good idea, too.



It's like a big slumber party.



A young bull settles in, showing off his first antlers. "Wow! I can't wait until I get some!", says a little admirer.

"Yeah - aren't they great!"



As their parents' graze . . .



. . . these lazy kids nibble while lying down.



"Hmmm . . . the grass looks greener over there . . ." It's remarkable how such big animals can so easily 'levitate' like this.





Chile the barn cat takes it all in stride - the elk don't bother him. Playing with a piece of alfalfa, he still thinks his barn is the coolest place on earth.



MM

It's tricky, riding the high country during the monsoon season - you just never know . .

It looked like a choice day for a ride in the green mountains near Nogal Peak (its distinctive 'pyramid' profile can be seen in the distance).



2021-08-29 - *Fast Getaway*

So, off we went. Hmm . . . are those rain drops on the windshield? (They were.)



Never mind - it looks sunny where we are headed.



All the rain has produced a bumper crop of elderberries - they are everywhere now. They hang in heavy bunches, like plump miniature grapes.



The horses were eager to explore up here again.



2021-08-29 - *Fast Getaway*

Page 4 of 12

We kept our eyes on those clouds gathering around the Peak. They didn't look too ominous (it's the thunderheads you need to avoid), and there was no lightning.



It's sunny across the basin below.



Wow.



The horses were having a wonderful time . . .



Then they showed up.



"Hi!" "Hi!" "We've been up here all summer by ourselves (well, except for the deer and elk who aren't all that sociable . . .). Nice to have company!"



2021-08-29 - *Fast Getaway*

To be honest, they were kind of pests. "So, where you guys from?"



Then more came out of the oak groves, to see what was going on.



It was kind of awkward when Belle said pointedly that this was our "FAMILY outing."



They didn't get the hint, but everyone got along.



Oh-oh. THAT'S a big thundercloud forming.



"We gotta run!", Spanky explained.



"Seriously, it was nice meeting you, but we have to go now."



("Hurry up! Let's go!")





It's already raining over there.



We made it all the way home before the rain started.

MM

During their annual summer visits, the elk renew their familiarity with the horses. It's pretty clear that some of them remember us, year after year.

We know the elk are around us, as we ride behind the house. It's up to them to reveal their whereabouts.



Meanwhile, the horses are happy with a little family time.



"Hmmm . . . where are they today?"



There they are. Thunder and a young bull make eye contact - do they recognize each other?



Acceptance and comfort.



Back on the ranch, we crest a hill and encounter this little herd.



Thunder is ready for his supper. "Time to eat . . . (again)."



Nice coexistence.



"I wonder where they go for their supper?"



It turns out that many of them are feasting along our driveway.



They chow down as I feed the horses.



Their presence is a gift.



MM

End Journal Part 3 of 3

Please Follow Us Some More... See All the Journals.

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