

REDEEMED

A RESCUE FROM
THE POWERS OF DARKNESS

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CHAPTER 1

The skies had cleared. The rain shower had passed, and with it the afternoon's dark thunderclouds. In its wake came the summer's bright sun and fleecy clouds of cumulous so real, it seemed you could almost reach out and touch them. Shafts of warm sunlight now filtered their way through the leafy branches of a barnyard tree, making dappled shadows in the mud.

Little Jesse sat in the muddy road to the barn playing with the ducks and pigs. He loved the farm and the collection of animals his grandparents kept on the old home place near Hyco, Texas. A tomcat named Milkshake watched him absentmindedly from his perch on a hay wagon nearby. Sadie, the farm dog, circled the little boy, stepping cautiously around mud puddles to keep her feet dry.

The dog was an Australian blue healer, and a most unusual one at that. When she was not yet a year old, she decided it was her job to herd the milk cows up from the pasture and into the barnyard corral. It was an odd behavior, but she seemed to do it instinctively, though everyone knew she had never done it before. For years she carried out that task faithfully and never missed a day of it the rest of her life.

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She also had a thing for stickers and sandburs. If she saw someone trying to pull a sticker out of their foot, she would come to their rescue and pull it out with her teeth.

After Sadie had a second litter of puppies, Jesse's grandmother decided to have her spayed so she would not have any more puppies. "Female dogs live shorter lives in proportion to how many litters they've had," she told Jesse. So Grandma had her spayed, but the maternal instinct was still strong in Sadie. She really wanted puppies, and not surprisingly, the next spring she stole a kitten from the barn, nursed it, and raised it as her own.

That kitten grew up to be Milkshake, the toughest cat in the farming community. He was a giant at fifteen pounds and would fight just about anything—dogs, rattlers, and large farm rats. The family famously dubbed him "raccoon fighter," because he even dared to take on the biggest raccoons in the woods out back of the barn.

The farm was a very special place for Jesse growing up. He ran barefoot from spring to fall and was brown as a bean from his days in the sun. Often, at a very early age, when he was playing he could feel the warm tenderness of God's presence with him. He did not really understand the concept of God as a five-year-old, but in his childlike faith he knew there was a higher power looking after him.

Some Sundays he would go with his family to the Methodist church in town. However, he much preferred romping with his cousins on the hills of his grandmother's farm.

Jesse stayed with his grandparents most days after school, and summers, since his parents worked long hours. He was very close to his grandmother, and she taught him many things, such as how to care for the chickens and how to grow a garden. His work on the farm during those early years gave him a green thumb, and this contact with nature drew him closer to God too.

His grandmother was of Comanche descent and loved to take Jesse on scavenger hunts for old arrowheads in the hills surrounding the farm. The farm was on an old Comanche reservation, so there was always something of importance to find. Old arrowheads, broken pieces of pottery, and tools made of antler lay everywhere.

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Once, Jesse found a big flat rock of flint the Native Americans had used for chipping out arrowheads. He thought it was the most amazing thing, and often he would imagine himself as a Comanche brave hunting buffalo or fighting settlers who had invaded their land.

His grandmother was not an animist like her Comanche ancestors, who worshiped the spirits of departed loved ones. She was a Christian and attended church faithfully on Sundays. She did not teach Jesse about the so-called spirits of departed ancestors. She did not talk about the “happy hunting grounds” to which they had gone in the animistic lore of the Native American culture.

It was a strange thought for Jesse as he roamed the hills in search of ancient arrowheads, but it also had a strange sense of appeal for him as a boy. He had seen plenty of books and movie westerns where this reference to spirits of ancestors was made, as though it were somehow an established fact of the spirit world. This made it easier for him to imagine the animal spirits of the buffalo and coyote and eagle as they joined the Comanche ancestors in the “great beyond.”

Unfortunately, the idea of departed spirits didn’t frighten him as it probably could have. No one warned him about the danger of such things, and this spelled trouble for the boy. He was just learning about the Creator God he saw revealed in nature, and now here was something extra that was confusing his young mind.

Was there indeed a God in heaven who ruled over all, and was He a loving God? Jesse felt it must be so as he felt the warm rays of the sun on his shoulders or lifted his hands to the sky when the soft rains caressed his little face.

And then there were the spirits that the old Comanche culture said lived in the hills and valleys of the farm. Were these spirits actually the departed dead who stepped back into the world of the living now and then? Did they care about the happiness and fate of earthlings who must still struggle with the pain and tragedies of this life?

Jesse didn’t know much about these things, and they were mystifying to him. Was it possible both of them existed—a loving God who cared about people, and spirit ghosts that roamed the hills of the Comanche

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hunting grounds? On the other hand, was there a God of love who allowed death to be perpetuated in a world of spirits that seemed to have no purpose? Was there a world of good and bad spirits in the hereafter who came back to haunt the lives of people still living?

No one seemed to have the answers when Jesse asked about such things. Not the preacher at the Methodist church they attended infrequently. Not his mother and father. Not even his dear grandmother to whom he was the closest.

The jumble of unanswered questions was puzzling and troubling to little Jesse. Unresolved, these matters would bring him trouble as he grew and wrestled with the real meaning of life.

Not surprisingly, as the months passed on the farm, Jesse experienced more and more of the strange encounters with the spirits his grandmother had talked about. These episodes were unexplainable and defied logic, but the “spirits” were more than just impressions in his mind. They were supernatural and surreal in every sense of the word. The strange rendezvous involved the presence of things extraordinary, clearly different from what he had experienced with the God of heaven Christians talk about. Most important, it was clear they wanted Jesse to understand they were the departed spirits of Native Americans who had once lived on the reservation.

At first Jesse was distrustful of them, and even afraid, but as the encounters continued, he became accustomed to them and even accepted their presence. As he played among the hills and ravines of the old farm, the supernatural “visitors” would introduce him to the things in nature that intrigued him the most, such as the cunning of a coyote to stalk its prey or the skill in which a spider designed its web to entrap a hapless insect.

The boy’s curious nature and desire to explore the unknown kept him naïve about the nature of these visits with the spirits. The ambitious part of his personality began to welcome the episodes, and as time passed, the experiences themselves became almost addictive.

At a later date Jesse would realize those experiences with his unseen “visitors” were dangerous. The messages he received by the supernatural

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instructors implied that nature was evil and that the strong must survive at the expense of the weak.

Jesse told no one in his family of these encounters with the supernatural world. He did not understand everything the “visitors” told him, but since he kept these things to himself, there was no one to tell him they were right or wrong.

He could not know it at the time, but these mysterious instructors were setting him up for a fall in which he would pay a heavy price.