

Star Dancer's
Summer Journey

the
journey
series

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W. Renore Mobley


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Preface



THE ABDUCTION

Large trees are often misshaped by windstorms, drought and fire; these three things combine to produce the gangliest forest canopy in this part of Northern California. Because of this, these tall trees seem to develop individual characteristics that created some of the most complex tree circles to hide into. Here these wanted men with their captives, hid out for more than a week knowing that Senor Lopez and his men, with all his money and power, would look for his daughter and the baby girl.

Entangling themselves from the undergrowth and fallen trees the party of four began to travel straight east at a faster pace. They hoped to come on to the wagon trail that many had followed to the gold fields twenty years earlier. Fleeing the west coast, they planned to find their fortune in the mines of the great Northwest. Their evil deed had been known in all of that state and they knew they had to leave.

The young woman that was with them, pressed the child against her breast and prayed there was still milk for the beautiful baby girl she held swaddled in the only blanket she had. They

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had supplies on the mules, with which they made the Senora` prepare the meals. They appeared to enjoy her cooking, and treated her well. At each meal they became more talkative, and their captive learned they planned to keep her with them, even though when they did their evil deed, they had only held her hostage so they could escape unharmed.

She never let the robbers know she understood and spoke English, and was always careful to speak only Spanish. She knew she needed an edge and maybe when they meet another traveling group she could make them understand she needed to be rescued. After the second week in the dense forest, they headed East with the sun full in their faces.

Acknowledgments

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I love you all, Win Lenore

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This book is dedicated to my parents, Claude and Leota Hull, whose Christian life introduced me to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God—and they bought me my first riding horse.



PART I

Star & Rand

Star & Rand

U nder cover of darkness, Star Dancer quietly slipped away from the big, log house. She feared her family would see her and prevent her from leaving. Her familiarity with the river trail and the light of a three quarter moon would enable her to safely make the mile hike to her destination.

“Serves them right; they don’t treat me right,” she spoke out loud knowing the sound of her voice would give her confidence. At the house she had left a note on the table, because she wanted her father and step mother to know why she made her decision to leave. “Maybe they will think about what *I* need for a change,” she muttered angrily.

A Great Horned Owl sounded its “*whoo whoo*” in reply, startling the pretty, half-Indian woman. The trail was soggy and spongy under her riding boots. She pulled her warm jacket tightly against her thin frame to protect her from the dampness of the recent rain.

Star heard water dripping from the tall trees, and each step she took, reminded her of the time she was trapped in a bog at Huckleberry Gulch. She was only nine years old and she had hiked there by herself. It was a frightening time, as

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she remembered with each step she took, the ground shook, threatening to dump her into the sinking sand that lay under the water's surface. That day, her grandmother had gone to harvest the bulbs and Star was told to remain at camp. It was not the first time she was left alone, as her Granny Ina' worked hard for their food supply. Star knew she would be in trouble if she left to explore a wilderness area that was not familiar to her. The only one who heard her cry for help that day, was her best friend, Will. It was a dangerous rescue for them as Will fell into the swamp and later contacted swamp fever. His recovery was long, and remembering this time, she hesitated. Was she doing the right thing? She tossed her head in defiance to rid her conscious that told her she had a wrong attitude, but she continued down the trail.

Star's independence was already carved into her when at the age of five, her mother was taken in an Indian raid, and she did not see her father until four years later. He was a good father to her now, but she felt that her stepmother couldn't tell her how to spend her time out on the lake, or up on the mountain. "After all, she had just graduated from the twelfth grade," she thought proudly.

She quickened her pace, and as planned, she reached the flooded river before daylight. The bank was lined with thick trees, and Star stopped to study them in the twilight. They seemed pressed together importing secrets to each other. A shiver ran through her, "Was she doing the right thing?" she again wondered. She suddenly felt lonely here and realized to actually be cut off from her family and friends was vastly different from the thought of it. Independence was wholly desirable, but in its first stage it seemed hard. Then from somewhere far off, sounded the wild bark, then the howl of a coyote, which gave chills down her back. A terrible sense of uncertainty assailed her.

Gazing at the dark, quick flowing water, a phrase she had just read in her literature book ran through her mind. She mouthed

the words with a smile “*there is an unknown river to run where falls are not known.*” She heard a call from above and looked up to see another early riser, a solitary hawk tucked against a cobalt blue sky.

“Just as you, Mr. Hawk, I too, am looking forward to the journey I plan to take,” this thought gave her the courage to continue and she turned to find her cache.

“Let’s see, right on this adjoining creek in one of these dead trees—it should be here,” she said as she moved in the breaking daylight. Reaching inside the second hollow tree, Star grabbed an old wooden oar that was stashed there. Shifting her pack, she banged the tree hard with the piece of solid wood. Suddenly, a heavy burned out canoe came crushing down falling against her leg. The impact caught her off guard and threw her forward with such force that she did not have time to protect her head. She went crashing into the opening of the canoe, hitting the wooden bottom hard, as they splashed into the water. The pain in her head was intense, and her breath was knocked out of her. She laid there with her eyes closed, then, in a few minutes slipped into unconsciousness.

As the sun rose over the mountains the spring rains flowed heavily into Black Warrior Creek. The waters began to rise and the blackened canoe became buoyant where it carried the young woman down stream. Soon the flooded creek dumped out into the dark, fast moving Boise River, and directed the canoe and its unconscious passenger out into the main current.

There were times during the day, that Star Dancer was aware of the tossing canoe. She tried to rise, but fainted back in pain. Often when she was plagued with a bad dream, she would awaken, frightened of what was happening to her.



SIX MONTHS EARLIER

Rand Cleland;

Rand Cleland a young cowboy, loved the Walking B ranch, its rhythms, the landscape and working there with the cattle. All of it played into his future, he thought. Then he met Billy. Even the simple life of working on this Idaho ranch can be unexpectedly complicated. The ranch, where Rand worked, encompassed about twenty thousand acres and was staked out before the country was surveyed. There were rich grasslands with fresh water, and a tract formed a V between the river on the west and deep canyons on the east. The west end was guarded by line riders like Rand where he spent most of the working day. Two cattle drives in the summer delivered the much needed beef into the rail-town of Fairfield. Just before the turn of the twentieth century, many of these towns had doubled in population causing the demanded for more beef.

Trailing cattle was slow and dirty, but Rand was happy to oblige when asked to go.

After two years of working with the trail foreman, he alone was entrusted with the count of the Walking B's cattle and the money collected from the sale. However, he much preferred to be a part of the roundup with the chuck wagon and the twilight circle around the campfire. The cattle drive provided good training for his string of young horses. About all a cowboy ends up with are his trained mustangs. There was always the danger of losing one in trouble with a mad bull or one run through a fence, but all in all, a good cowboy, like Rand, could end up owning ten to twenty head of roping cow ponies to sell, trade or start up his own herd on a small spread. This was where Rand

could see his future going—that is until Billy entered his life and all was about to change.

The ranch cowboys dubbed his friend, Billy, Billy Sunday, because every Sunday that Billy could, he went into town to attend church. Billy had soft eyes and a quiet manner that set him apart from the others.

One Sunday morning, Rand was looking forward to sleeping in. He had been up half the night playing cards with Joe and Curley. “It was a lot more profitable then spending money in the saloon in town,” Rand thought. “After all I have been taught moderation in all I do. And it would be less drinking, and no need to be in the company of the women that hung around those places. It is wasteful the way many of the cowboys spend their entire paycheck in one weekend.”

After breakfast, Rand was enjoying some leisure time. He reached for his guitar, tuned it, and began strumming a tune. “Fare you well...” he began as Billie walked in all dressed up in his Sunday clothes. Rand nodded to him with a smile and continued playing.

“Well, hurry up or we will be late,” Billy interrupted. Rand stared at him with a questioning raised brow but continued strumming the guitar.

“You agreed to go with me to church. There is a tent meeting at this end of town and if you hurry we can make it on time,” Billy instructed.

Groaning, Rand replied, “OK, I always kept my promises. Give me a minute.” He placed his feet on the floor and prepared to leave.

Rand’s faith was renewed at church that Sunday. He began to study the Bible with Billy and their closeness continued well into the summer months. When one of them volunteered to do something for the boss, the other most always went along. No other person had stirred such a friendship in Rand Cleland in the years since he left home.

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Rand found himself in a spot he never imagined. “Well, if this is Devils Tower, I sure must have walked into it with my eyes wide open,” he mused, trying to clear his head. Pressed to the ground with almost no protection he began to shiver and realized he was going into shock. The pool of blood under him told the story of why the pain in his side was intense.

“I was not raised to be a troublemaker or end up like this,” he thought. “If I move and reveal myself, they will take me to jail—if I live.” He felt a weakness come over him in waves; fighting for consciousness, he recalled the event. “Earlier this evening we were just a bunch of cowboys from a long cattle drive. Did I really fire those shots? What will become of me?” Rand’s heart cried out wondering if it might be true what his father had said about him—that he was no good. Rand often got into trouble after school and his father had told him he should be home helping at the farm. At sixteen, he had an astute mind. His stocky build gave him an advantage from the teasing he got from his dark, red hair.

That winter when the sheriff came with the banker, they were told they needed to move off the homestead for the mortgage had not been paid. Rand would never forget how his mom cried when she had to leave her home. A sense of guilt dogged him as he felt he could have done more for her. A critical relationship continued with his father, so when he turned eighteen, he hugged his mother good-bye and left to go west.

During his two years as a wrangler, Rand had not regretted living on his own—until now. He wondered how his mother was, and if he would ever see her again?

Rand did not know all of what had happened today, but he knew by the noise of the horse’s hooves upon the hard dirt below, the posse was looking for him. He remembered riding

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the horse and someone yelling at him to hang on. But it was mostly a blur. Fearing the posse would soon find him, he tried to stand up, but fell back losing consciousness.

The next few weeks were like a nightmare to Rand. He was in and out of hospitals, then to jail before the bandages were removed. In the hospital he had been clean shaven and well cared for. Now two months later in this large prison, his face was unshaven and he was very thin. They never called him by name; it was as though he had already been pronounced guilty.

Rand had a lot of time to think about what faith really was. During this time in Rand's spiritual growth, he learned that God has a plan for him. He had time to study and write, as someone had sent him some of his personal items and among them were his Bible and his reading glasses.

"Help me, Lord, I need to find a way out of this situation," he prayed. And as he continued, he felt a weight being lifted from his soul. Shivering from the late evening chill, he knew sleep would not come. He turned to his notebook and to the pages where he had written a song. How he longed for his guitar as he felt he had finally composed the tune that went with the words.

"I believe I will call this song, The Promise of the Trees," and then he began to sing.

"March and the winter lingers.
Cold grips the soul with icy fingers.
Piercing winds cry—sigh.
The trees wear no cloaks through the storm
But stand bare with no show of life.
Rain and sleet their shrouds, I mourn,

Blending, swaying,
Yielding to the will of winter's strife.
Look again, see the promise. The trees are not dead!
The stark limbs, dappled with drops of blood red

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Are birthing new life? Spring's leaves—
A promise of their resurrection—the glory of trees.
The trees reflect the seasons,
Even the seasons of man.
Oft buffeted by the storms of life,
Before them, even he must stand
But certain as the promise of Christ
Whose blood stained Calvary's tree,
That we might have new life
Purchased salvation for you and me.
He conquered death, arose in victory
Over came our dark winter of sin.
Resurrection! Salvation and Glory to Him!*

Rand then bowed his head and prayed, “Lord, life is easy when upon the mountain, but it changes when one is down in the valley. However, if the growth occurs while I'm climbing it—as it says in Your word, then I will claim another promise that You will not forsake me when I am down in the valley.” Rand then turned over on his blanket and fell asleep.



Late one evening several days later, a Spanish man that smelled strongly of alcohol was thrown into the cell with him. He was wearing a large sombrero and a poncho . At daylight, the deputy would open the jail door and call out this man's name. Partly sober, the Spanish man would amble out unnoticed. Watching this event one morning Rand devised a plan for himself which he implemented the escape the next morning.

Rand's heart beat wildly as he stepped out into the bright morning sun. He went behind the next building and discarded

the sombrero. From the cover of the poncho he took out another wide brimmed hat, which another prisoner had discarded. Rand peered around the corner into the street. It looked empty, no deputy in sight. He firmly placed the Stetson on his head, tipped down the wide brim hiding most of his face, and walked his way to freedom.



Several months after his escape from prison, Rand found solitude in this northern Nevada range with its boundless horizons. The beauty of the resting band of sheep lying before him in the evening light gave him a feeling of security. These lonely nights worked on Rand's mind and a miraculous transformation occurred. The first miracle had happened when a Spanish shepherd was willing to trade this band of sheep for Rand's branded herd of horses that he had left in a canyon on the walking B's range. Today, he felt like a colt without a fence as he began to think about what must be done in the spring when he herded the sheep back to the summer ranges in Idaho.

"I call myself a different name, I am still an outlaw, and even this simple life can become unexpectedly complicated. I know the past will come back to haunt me, but right now this hideout is perfect for me," he said aloud, while stroking his dog Houston on his smooth head. "When the law is less interest in finding me, I will return to Idaho. This work has given me time to think about what happened in that saloon, as my memory is hazy on that part." Rand removed his hat and wiped his wet brow with his sleeve, he again put his hand on Houston's head to softly finger the dog's ear. "What I do remember," he continued, "is that my main focus was to get the Walking B's money

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safely to the bank. I only intended to have one drink with Billy Morgan and Joe Devers. I remember feeling bad soon after the first drink, but cannot recall getting on my horse and going up that mountain where I was captured.. Billy or Joe Devers would have answers for me, and I must find them as soon as I can.” Rand smiled as Houston cocked his dark head and gave a wine in reply as if he cared.

“Here, I have had time to think clearly, to sort out my youthful past. It is important that I understand the affection my father did have for me and to know it was given with love in the only way he knew how. He gave me the attention when I needed it and *was* there for me. Granted it was often a negative encounter, but I did have a rebellious spirit my last year at home. I wonder if I will get a chance to tell my father how much I love him. When I get into a town with a telegraph station, I must send a message home,” he mused. Houston whined again, as if listening to his every word, and home, was significant to him too. Home was where Rand had learned that love, not time, heals all wounds. He then began to recite words of the psalmist;

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving kindness;

In your great compassion, blot out my offenses.

Wash me through and through from my wickedness

And cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

Against you only have I sinned....”

