



JAKE'S FORTUNE

A NOVEL BY
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Jake's Fortune

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this book are from the *King James Version* of the Bible.

DEDICATION

To Julia, Summer, Luke, Robby, Danny, Jonathan, Kylie,
Janie, Calvary, and Benjamin.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I created the skeletal bones of this novel.
Anna Jackson brilliantly gave the story
flesh and blood realism.

May God breathe life into it, raise it up,
and use it to speak to many.



shot

CALIFORNIA, 1858

Jake was in the barn when he heard his mother scream. The sound of it stopped his heart. It was unmistakable. Something truly terrifying had just happened.

In less time than it takes to blink, he'd dropped the mallet and was sprinting to the house. His foot slipped and he went down face first, but he hardly felt it. His heart was hammering out of his chest by the time he got around the corner of the house.

He saw Ma running to help Pa down off his horse. Pa's left arm hung limply at his side and a bloody spot on his shoulder was widening by the moment.

"Oh dear God!" she cried out again. "Luke! What happened?"

"No, Julia. Grab me on the other side," he winced as she helped him down.

"Oh dear God, help us!"

"Are you shot?" Jake shouted. "Who did this? Pa? What's happening?" Everything seemed to be going in slow motion.

"You've got to get hidden. They're coming ..." Luke

steadied himself. “Get hidden, I said. There’s no time.”

Down the road, a dusty smudge was getting closer.

Five year-old Summer stood wide-eyed and motionless inside the front door of the house, a mixing bowl still in her hands. Her long black hair blew in the breeze as she stood stock still, seemingly unable to process what was going on.

“You heard Pa, get in the house!” Jake shouted as he pointed to the door with his shaking hand. He was surprised to hear the ferocity in his own voice. She dropped the mixing bowl and cried out clapping both hands to her mouth.

“No. No, Jake.” Luke’s voice was gentle. He forced a tight smile and spoke unnecessarily slowly.

Julia watched him, amazed that he was managing to impart some sense of stability to an out-of-control situation.

“The house won’t work, son. That’s the first place they’ll look.” He put his hand on Jake’s shoulder.

Jake turned and looked into his father’s eyes. They were kind eyes—hazel in color and crinkled around the edges from days of walking a plow, squint-eyed, in the sun.

Luke went down on one knee and reached out with his good arm toward his little girl. “It’s okay darling. Come here to Papa, Summer.”

She hesitated only a moment and then came running. “Papa, who hurt you?” she sobbed as she threw her arms around his neck.

Jake felt a lump come up in his throat that he couldn’t swallow. He blinked and furiously wiped hot tears out of his eyes. He gritted his teeth and willed no more tears to come.

Luke kissed his daughter’s tousled hair. He squeezed her lightly with his good arm, but didn’t answer her question. “I

love you, darling. Now go to your ma." Summer scrambled over to grasp her mother around the legs.

Jake set his teeth and tightened his whole face as his pa stood again to face him. He didn't want his pa to see he'd been crying.

Luke put his good hand on Jake's arm and locked eyes with him for a long moment. Jake felt that his father was looking at him, not the way a parent looks at a 14 year-old, but the way one man looks at another. Jake felt he had aged in a moment.

"You take your ma and your sister and hide under the chicken coop."

"Pa, I'm staying!"

"No you are not, Son. There's too many. I know what I'm doing. Go! Take care of your mother and sister. Quickly!"

Ma put Summer on her hip, tears still streamed down her cheeks. *O Lord*, she prayed silently, *please help us!*

Luke watched as Summer realized she was being taken away. "No, no!" she screamed as she fought to get out of her mother's arms. "Don't leave Papa, he's hurt! Papa! Papa! Come with us!"

Luke could no longer watch them—it was enough to tear out his heart. *God protect them*, he prayed. Then he turned and headed toward the house as fast as he could go.

Jake ran ahead of his mother and sister and threw open the coop door. The chickens cackled and flew around the coop as Jake dropped to his knees, frantically brushing away hay from the floor until he could find the knothole.

"Ma, go back to Papa!" Summer sobbed.

Julia put her little girl on the ground and squatted to face her. "Summer, this is no game. You must be silent, *instantly*." It hurt her heart to see how Summer's eyes widened in fear,

but she couldn't be soft now. "If you make even one sound, you could cause things to be even worse."

Wide-eyed, Summer nodded slightly with understanding. She immediately clamped her mouth closed, scrunched her eyes shut, and stood there with her little hands in fists. Julia felt so proud as she saw how hard her little girl was trying to obey. She scooped her up and squeezed her tight, trying hard to keep herself from sobbing aloud.

Jake found the knothole and the trap door flew up. Part of the wooden floor was hinged here on leather straps. Below was little more than a large hole in the ground, and it was filthy from chicken droppings, but it offered a safe hideaway that only the family knew about.

About eight months ago, Luke had come home with some disturbing news. A family that lived only a few miles north had been robbed in their own home. The father, who wasn't the type to trust banks, had been badly beaten before he would tell the thieves where he had hidden the family's money. The family lost everything. Luke decided his family would have a safe hiding place, now well hidden under a new chicken coop.

Julia remembered how she'd thought Luke was overreacting when he dug out and built the coop. She had almost forgotten all about it—but now she was thanking God for this little hole.

Jake helped her down, then handed her Summer. He quickly climbed in, but instead of sitting down, he crouched, holding the door above his head so he could see out.

"I can't see Pa," Jake whipped his head around.

"God will take care of your pa, Jake." Julia hated to hear the way her own voice was shaking. "We must pray for him." Summer sobbed softly into her mother's shoulder.

Julia looked at her son, his wavy dark blonde hair was filled with sweat and dirt. He looked so much like his pa.

“Who *are* these men?” Jake whispered sharply. “Who shot him? What’s going on?”

“I honestly don’t know, Jake. Please just pray!” she said as she bit the side of her lip and thought, *Now that’s not entirely true, is it? You have an idea, don’t you?*

“Where is Pa anyway? I hope he’s getting the gun.” Jake felt so angry. *I should have stayed with him!*

“There he is!” He saw his father jogging painfully back to stand beside his horse. The first of the four men was riding up. He father stood unflinching next to his horse. Jake pounded his fist when he saw Pa did *not* have the gun.

I should be out there! Jake thought again. It took every ounce of control for him to keep from flying out of that dugout and to his father’s side, but Pa’s words came forcefully to mind: *Stay here and protect, Ma and Summer.*

He strained to see details, but he was just too far removed to see much. All four men on horseback surrounded his father, but he couldn’t see much from this distance except basic details. All four were riding bay horses. The one with the black hat was tall, and Jake might have assumed he was the leader, but he wasn’t the one doing the talking. The man with the white hat was. *He must be the leader,* Jake thought.

He could barely hear anything from his hiding place. The man with the white hat was asking his pa something. Pa answered. The man said something else, and his father spoke again. “They’re talking ... but ... I can’t hear!” he whispered to his ma in frustration. The panic was rising in his chest with every passing second.

He turned and looked at his ma. Her eyes were tightly

shut as her lips moved silently. Summer's face was still buried in her mother's shoulder.

He looked back to his pa. Whatever this conversation was about, it didn't seem to be getting worse. The man still spoke in a normal tone of voice and he could hear his father answering calmly. Maybe they would just leave. *Oh God, please let them just leave.*

"God, *please* take care of my father," he whispered as he ducked down a little farther. "If we ever needed your help, we need it now!"

The man asked another question and Luke answered. Jake started when the man put his right hand down next to his gun holster and fanned out his fingers in a peculiar way, like he was playing the piano in the air. The man said something else to Luke, and then did it again—fanned his fingers in the air. Luke said something back and the man seemed satisfied. He sat up a little taller in the saddle and began to turn. Jake felt himself relax slightly. Then before he could even grasp what was happening, the man grabbed his gun and a shot rang out.

Jake watched his father drop to the ground. *They shot him!* He watched in horror as the man calmly cocked his gun, aimed, and shot his father again.

Jake dropped down into the dugout hard and fast pulling the trap door down over his head. *They shot him! They shot him!* He locked eyes with his terrified mother. He could barely see her in the light coming down through the slats, but he watched as she clamped her eyes closed and bit her lip until it began to bleed. She held Summer so tightly that it looked like she was smothering her, but Jake could see that Summer was grasping at her mother with the same urgency.

"Now find it!" they heard one of the men shout.

Find what? What are they looking for? Jake could hear one of the men coming closer. The man stopped to yank the door of the coop open. The chickens were panicking. Dust and droppings were raining down through the slats onto their heads.

Oh God, I'm not ready to die. I'm not ready to die. Jake could see the man's boots through the cracks overhead. He got a glimpse. It was the biggest of all the men—the tall one with the black hat.

"What does he want me to do?" the man muttered under his breath. "Look under every stinkin' chicken?" He walked over to the nests and began throwing out the hay by handfuls.

The chickens had all run out the open door, so there was no more clucking to cover any sounds they made. Thankfully, the man above was making a lot of noise tearing up the chicken coop.

Suddenly the man stopped and was quiet.

Julia pulled her daughter closer. Summer was as stiff as a stick, but her breath was quick and panicked on Julia's neck. She felt her own heart beating hot in her cheeks and ears.

Jake tried to quiet his own breathing while the man just stood there, silently, as agonizing seconds passed. He flattened himself against the dirt wall, and held his breath, waiting for the ceiling to suddenly fly upward.

The sweat pouring off his head stung Jake's eyes.

Farther off, they could hear the crashing sounds of the house being ransacked. Jake and his mother both watched the ceiling even though they couldn't even see the man's boots anymore. The hay he'd torn out of the nests was now

completely covering the floor.

Finally, the man coughed and then shouted to his companions, "It's not out here, it's got to be in the barn or the house." In a few steps, he was gone.

Jake's face was hot and his ears were buzzing. He relaxed slightly against the dirt wall.

They could hear the sounds of the house and barn being torn apart. Time seemed to be passing so slowly. It was both a relief and a horror when they finally heard the men riding away.

Jake stood cautiously. His arms trembled as he raised the chicken coop floor. He looked around slowly then he scrambled out and ran around the farm. All four of the men were riding away.

He ran with a sense of urgency. He didn't even know what he was looking for.

A compelling novel of mystery and romance that breathes with suspense and intrigue. Greed over gold, cold-blooded murder, overwhelming bitterness, abiding faith, romantic love, abuse, blackmail, secrecy, and intense personal struggles are the core elements of this great work that is set in the Wild West of the nineteenth century.

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