

HER NAME IS
CHANDRA

By BUD SIMPSON

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As ever, this book is dedicated to my loving and much loved wife, Margo Elizabeth Simpson, (1936-2022) and to my daughter, Denise Marie Simpson who has always been a helpmate and loving daughter.

Also, as always, to Little Lupe, that little "Werewolf" I met at the old Los Angeles Zoo, so many years ago.

INTRODUCTION

JACK HAGEN HAD just locked the front door to his bar, *The Tender Trap*, in Costa Mesa, California. A few drops of rain hit him as he walked across the parking area to his pickup truck. He shook his head and thought, *Damn, I was hoping to be home before this thing hit.*

The prediction was for heavy rain before morning. It was just before midnight now. Earlier, the full moon had risen right on schedule but was quickly snuffed out by the dark clouds filling the sky from above. The clouds had begun showing about a half hour after the full moon had shown itself.

Jack opened the door to his truck and eased himself into the seat. He was feeling tipsy. He had finished their regular Saturday night double elimination eight-ball tournament and had probably had a beer or two too many. Not enough to get him drunk, but enough to cause a cop to cite him for "impaired driving" if he wasn't very careful driving home.

As the owner of the bar, he always participated in the tournament. It let him get to know his customers better and add some enjoyment to the evening for him. He was more than just a good player. In his early days, he made a living hustling at the table, but he would never allow himself to win one of his own tournaments.

Second or third was all he ever finished. Let a customer take home the "Winner of the Tender Trap eight-ball tournament" trophy. It was good for business.

He enjoyed the warm, easy feeling of a few drinks too many. But he was very circumspect if he had to drive in that condition, so he looked carefully in both directions as he eased his pickup out onto Main Street. Not much traffic tonight. Probably because of the predicted rain.

Jack lived near the Mile Square Regional Park just off Edinger Avenue. Things were going swimmingly, he thought until he was nearly home. As he crossed the so-called Santa Ana River, a sudden bright flash lit up the darkness and the night seemed to explode! A clap of thunder so loud that it made his truck vibrate made him jam on his brakes and he slid to a stop. He knew exactly what it was! Just a lightning strike so close to him that it made him wonder if his truck had been hit.

"Holy Kee- rist," he yelled. "Talk about being scared sober! My God!"

To make matters worse, the thunderbolt seemed to have split open the heavens above. Rain started cascading down so hard he thought the paint might be power washed off his truck! He took a deep breath and started on his journey again, his heart still pounding.

Even when he turned his wipers at full speed, he still couldn't see clearly. He drove even slower now until he crossed the Santa Ana River. It was not much more than a small trickle in a concrete lined trough. He shook his head. Rain like this would make it flow properly if it kept up at *this* rate, anyway!

Then he saw his turn off. He eased the truck into his street and approached his house. He hit the opener button and saw his garage door sliding upward. He pulled into his driveway and started into his garage.

That was when, unbeknownst to him at that moment, his life was to undergo a dramatic change. Just as his truck was halfway into the garage, he saw a sudden flash of movement to his left just below his truck's door. It was so quick he couldn't tell what it was. Maybe the wind had blown a piece of trash into the garage along with him. He didn't think too much about it.

He pulled all the way in and shut off the engine. He sat there for a moment, trying to look into the gloom of his garage. Nothing made a move. It was very still. *Ha!* he thought. *I'm going to have to replace some of those burnt-out bulbs.*

He shook his head as he stepped out onto the concrete floor. He shut the truck door and looked about. He even bent down and peered under the truck. No use! Too dark to see anything so he walked into the house.

He gave his usual, "Honey, I'm Home."

His wife replied. "Glad you got here in one piece. That's one of the worst rains I've ever seen here in Santa Ana!" "Tell me about it! I could hardly see since that big thunderclap. It looked as if the rain was waiting for a signal to drop its load all at once. My wipers couldn't clear the water it was coming down so hard."

He hugged her and gave her a kiss. "How was your day, Sweetie?"

"Typical. At my age, I don't think I could handle much excitement. A few phone calls trying to scam me into buying what the hell ever they were selling. Just because I'm getting old, they think I'm getting stupid, too."

Jack laughed. "At least it's sort of fun at the bar. I had to work real hard at letting the guys beat me in the eight-ball tournament. You know what one guy told me when I missed twice on purpose so he could win?"

"Ha! I can guess. He asked you if you were getting too old, didn't he?"

"You're a mind reader. That's exactly what he said. When I sell that place, I'm gonna have an all-day tournament and pay anyone a hundred bucks if they can beat me. That'll let them know how bad they really are."

They chit-chatted for a few more moments when Jack thought about the movement he had seen when he drove into the garage.

"Honey, I want to check something out. Is that flashlight still in that cabinet?"

"I think so. Why?"

"Well, when I drove in, I thought I saw something running into the garage beside me. I wanna check it out. Probably just the wind blowing something in, but it seemed too big for that"

He walked over to the cabinet and took out the light, then walked over to the window in the garage door and shined the light out. He moved it about but could see nothing unusual. He opened the door and stepped down into the garage. He shined it around once more, and then he saw it.

It looked like a very wet dog huddled in the far corner shivering and shaking. "Honey, come here. I think it's a dog. Grace stepped into the garage and Jack shined the light

into the corner. It illuminated the shivering animal.

"Oh, the poor thing! It's shivering. It must be cold."

Jack took a closer look. He squinted his eyes and said, "I don't think it's a dog. I think it's a coyote."

They both moved a bit closer, and Grace said, "I think it's injured, Jack. Look at the blood on its shoulder. You're right, though. It's a coyote."

They walked a little closer and the coyote whined a bit and tried to shrink its body down into the corner even deeper. Grace saw this and said, "The poor little thing is scared to death. Look at her."

"Her? How do you know it's a 'her'?"

"I just feel it. Wait here for a moment, Jack. I'm going to get a blanket for it. I'll be right back."

In a few moments, Grace reappeared with an old blanket in her hands. She slowly approached the scared animal and started speaking softly to it as if it were a child

"Don't be afraid, Sweetheart. I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to cover you with this nice warm blanket. Okay?"

Jack was surprised to see the animal relax its body a little. Grace took another slow step in its direction, holding the blanket in front of her.

"Be careful, Honey! It's a wild animal and they can be unpredictable, you know."

"I don't sense any meanness in it, Jack. It's just scared."

She eased forward another step and told the coyote, "I'm just going to put this blanket over you so you will get warm. Then, tomorrow we'll let you go. It's cold and wet out there tonight. You'll be safe here. Okay?"

The animal made no motions at all as Grace tossed the blanket over it. They stood there looking at it for a moment. Then Grace

bent down and lightly touched it through the blanket. She tucked it in around the shivering body and talked soothingly to it.

Then she loosened it around its head so it could see out and said, "Okay. We're going in the house now. Get some rest. We'll see you in the morning."

They turned and walked back into the kitchen. Grace had tears in her eyes as she looked up at Jack.

"I hate to see any animal suffer. I hope she'll be okay."

Jack gave her a hug and said, "You treated it as if were a kid. I was afraid it might jump at you and give you a good bite. It might have rabies, you know. It's not acting normally."

"Yes, Jack. I know. But, for some unknown reason, I felt that this is a special little animal."

Just *how* special it was, they would find out in the morning.

1



CHAPTER 1

GRACE KEPT JACK up throughout the night. She had had a hard time falling asleep. Finally, she told him that she would get up and sleep on the living room couch so as not to disturb him.

He was half asleep and just nodded to her. She grabbed a blanket from the closet and left him in peace. Even after she had gotten comfortable on the couch, sleep didn't come to her. After an hour or so, she shook her head and sat up. The clock by the TV told her it was almost 6:00 am.

Hell with this, she thought. I'm getting up. Jack can sleep as long as he wants.

She got up and slipped her robe on and went into the kitchen. She heated some water for a cup of tea. After brewing it, she went back into the living room and sat on the couch. She turned on the TV and found a local news channel. It was reporting what she thought it would probably be.

The news guy was telling about how bad the storm had been and that it had moved out of the area. Indeed, the sun would rise this morning in spite of the storm, and it would be a typical sunny, Southern California day. A few minor mudslides in a few canyons was the only damage the storm had left behind.

As she sipped the tea, she wondered if her new girlfriend, the coyote, might want a sip of water. She got up, went into the kitchen and put some water into an old pie plate and went out into the garage. She carefully walked to the corner without spilling too much and set the dish down where its nose should be.

"Hey, Miss Coyote. Are you in the mood for a drink?"

She lifted the blanket slightly and the coyote's nose poked out about an inch. She pushed the plate a few inches closer, and the animal sniffed at it. Then its tongue shot out and it started to drink the water. Grace smiled. This was not the behavior of a wild animal at all. She wondered if this little girl had been a tamed animal; someone's pet, maybe.

After a few minutes the coyote stopped drinking. Its nose disappeared under the blanket.

"Had enough, eh? Okay. I'll take it away. You drank most of it anyway."

She reached down to remove the plate when the coyote's nose eased its way back out. Its tongue reached out and licked the tips of her fingers. This little act almost brought tears to Grace's eyes. It was so unexpected.

"Okay, little gal. When Jack gets up, we'll check you out. Be brave! We won't hurt you."

CHAPTER 2

SHE HAD BEEN sitting watching the morning news for only a half-hour when a slightly bleary-eyed Jack shuffled out of the bedroom. She looked at him and laughed.

"It was a worse night for you than I thought, eh?"

"Nah! Not too bad. I kept thinking about that damned animal. You know, it doesn't act at all like a wild coyote should. Do you think it might be tamed or something?"

Grace smiled and answered, "The same thought was in my head this morning. I took some water out and she drank it. Then, she actually licked my fingers to thank me. That was strange, I thought."

"Strange enough. What do you want for breakfast? It's on me today."

"Oh, thanks, Honey. Just a couple of scrambled eggs, some buttered toast and more tea would be great."

"Easy enough. I'll have the same. Then we'll check out our guest. Hope it hasn't reverted to its wild state. That might be a problem."

Jack set to cooking breakfast and in ten minutes, they were both sitting at the kitchen table enjoying Jack's offerings and some enjoyable chit-chat.

The sun broke through the morning overcast and bathed their table in golden light.

"Wow," said Grace. "Isn't that beautiful? Last night was such a terror, but it looks like today might be great."

"I hope so," replied Jack. "It was a bit scary to drive in. I've never seen such heavy rain since I moved here. It was needed, though."

"It was a good thing I could use city streets to get home on. I'll bet the freeways were terrible. That was the first storm of the year and that always causes a lot of accidents. For nine months the pavement gets all the worn-off rubber from thousands of tires, plus any oil that drips off cars and trucks. That, mixed with water can make for slippery driving."

Grace nodded in agreement and said, "Yeah. It sure does. It's almost like driving on black ice."

"For sure! Well, I'm finished here. Why don't I go out and see to our little critter. You can come out after you've eaten."

"Okay, Honey. Go ahead. I won't be long."

Jack got up and put his breakfast utensils in the sink. Then he headed for the garage door, opened it, turned on the lights, and walked out into the garage. The blanket covering their new friend was a bit more rumpled than it had been, but a few movements under it proved that the coyote was still there and alive.

He eased his way to the corner. He didn't want to startle the animal. He bent over, picked up the corner of the blanket and almost yelled because of what he saw.

He froze in place and when he got his voice back, he called out loudly to Grace.

"Grace! Get out here, *now*. You're not gonna believe this!"

CHAPTER 3

"OH, MY GOD!" said Grace, as she rushed to the door leading to garage. "I hope nothing's wrong with the little guy!"

She rushed to Jack's side and asked, "Is she still alive, Jack?"

Jack replied in a quavering voice, "Oh, she's alive alright! You won't believe this, though."

He reached down, took the corner of the blanket between his fingers as if it were a hot coal, and slowly drew it upward. What it revealed made Grace gasp in wonder, also. Instead of revealing her little coyote, she saw flesh! White flesh! It was the flesh of a very young girl! The girl was huddled in a tight fetal position and was as bare as the day she had been born!

They stared at the small body, not able to say a word. Then, Grace's mother instincts kicked in and she knelt beside this totally unexpected happening. She reached down and touched her.

"Oh, the poor child! She's as cold as death. Run into the bedroom and bring back one of my fleece robes. Quick, Jack! Oh, the poor child."

Jack shook his head in wonder at how quickly Grace could react to something as unusual as what they were looking at. Not because of what they were seeing, but because of what they were *not* seeing.

A coyote! Where had it gone? Where had this girl come from? What in hell was going on here?

He quickly let these thoughts exit his mind as he obeyed Grace's command. In less than a minute, he was back with her fleeciast robe. He had bought it for her as an anniversary gift two years ago. Grace loved it because it made her feel very queenly when she was wrapped in its soft embrace.

Grace reached down and shook the child gently and said, very soothingly, "Come on, Honey. Wrap this around you. You must be freezing. This is Southern California, but that was a cold rain last night. Come on, Dear. Stand up if you can and let me wrap this around you. Okay?"

The little girl responded to Grace's voice as the coyote had. She stood and Grace quickly wrapped the warm robe about her.

As she did, Grace noticed a slight wound, almost healed, on the girl's shoulder and frowned. A thought quickly flitted through her mind before she dismissed it. Didn't the poor little coyote have a wound in the same place?

"Jack, pick her up and carry her into the living room and let her lie on the couch. I can see that she's shivering."

Jack quickly obeyed and smiled at himself. Grace, a former nurse, was acting wisely. Take care of the girl first and then comes all the questions racing through their minds.

Grace sat on the couch with the girl and put her arm around her and drew her close, then she hugged her protectively for a few moments and asked, "What's your name, Honey?"

At first the girl didn't respond, so Grace said, "You're with friends, Sweetheart. We won't harm you. All we want is for you to be back home with your mom. Okay?"

The girl nodded and then said in a timorous tone, "My name is Chandra Wilson. Where am I?"

"You're in our house. I'm Grace and this is Jack. Can you tell us how you got into our garage?"

Chandra frowned and seemed deep in thought. Then she said, "I don't know. All I can remember is falling asleep in my room. Then I had a lot of strange dreams. I'm sure they must have been dreams because they were so strange.

"I was running and running. It was wonderful! I had never run so fast or far in my whole life."

"So, you like to run, do you?"

"Oh, yes! I'm on my school's track team. I win a lot. It's fun."

"Does your mother know where you are?"

"I don't know. What time is it?"

Grace glanced across the living room at a clock in the kitchen and replied, "It's 7:30 in the morning, Chandra."

"She might not. She usually lets me sleep in on Saturday mornings. I don't usually get up until 8:30 or 9:00 o'clock. Today is Saturday, isn't it?"

"Yes, Honey. It is. Are you okay? I mean, physically. I saw a scar on your shoulder. Did anything bad happen to you? Should we call the police?"

Chandra started and said loudly, "Oh no! Please don't call them. Nothing bad happened, I'm sure. Just call Mom and let her know I'm okay. Where are we, anyway? What town?"

"You're in Santa Ana. Where do you live?"

"I live in West Garden Grove near the airport."

"Los Alamitos?"

"Yeah. The old Army Airport."

"That's about seven miles from here," said Jack. "That's a long walk for a little girl to do on a dark and stormy night, isn't it?"

"I guess it would be. I think I ran most of the way, though."

"You ran?" asked Grace. "Well ... I *think* I did. But it seemed more like a dream than real life. I mean, I was near my window in my bedroom. The moon had just come up and I watched it. It was cloudy, so I wasn't getting a really good look at it. Then it came out from behind the clouds really bright. It was beautiful!"

"I didn't see it at all. It was supposed to be a super moon, wasn't it?"

"Yeah!" said Chandra. "It was super, alright. I pushed up my window to see it better. It seemed to light up my whole room. Then it went back in and after a few minutes, I got really warm and sleepy. I think I fell asleep then."

"That's when the dream began. I dreamed I was outside, and things seemed to be so bright, even with the moon behind the clouds. I just felt so free and so alive! I wanted to run in the moonlight."

"So, you did, didn't you?" "Yeah! I guess I did. But it didn't feel real. I felt as if I were floating instead of running on solid ground. It was so wonderful!"

Grace looked at Jack and said, "When I was young, I had dreams like that at times. Can you imagine me running like that?"

"Hey! I can't imagine me running like that. Those days are gone forever for me, even though I was on my high school track team."

Chandra's eyes lit up and she said, "So am I. I'm on the high school track team. I run the mile and the dashes."

Grace asked, "How old are you, Honey? You don't look as if you're old enough to be in high school."

Chandra looked a little sheepish, but replied, "Well, I'm thirteen but I skipped a couple of grades in elementary school. So, I'm in high school."

"Wow! That's wonderful! So, you're a brainiac besides being an athlete, huh?" said Jack.

"How do you do in track?" asked Grace.

Chandra blushed a little bit and replied, "I set a new record in the mile at school."

Grace looked shocked and thought, *This little mite of a girl set a mile record?*

"That's quite an accomplishment isn't it?" asked Jack. "You're not very big. Those other kids had longer legs than you. They could cover more ground in one step, couldn't they?"

That's when Chandra giggled and said, "Yeah, they could. But I can take more steps quicker than they could."

Grace laughed this time. "More bounce to the ounce, hey?"

"This is all very interesting, but don't you think I should call your mother now? What's your number, Chandra?"

Chandra told her but said, "Please, don't tell her I was naked when you found me! That would make her think of a dozen wrong things. Just tell her I'm fine and want to come home. Okay?" Grace smiled and thought, *She really is a smart kid.*

"Okay, I won't. But, first come with me. I have clothes in my closet that belonged to my granddaughter. I think they'll

fit you or come close. If you want to, you can take a shower and, like we old gals say, freshen up a little. That okay by you?

"After you freshen up, I'll cook breakfast for you. Bacon and eggs okay with you?"

"That would be wonderful! I feel as if I could eat a horse."

"We don't have any horse bacon, so I guess you'll have to settle for ordinary hog bacon."

Chandra, apparently feeling much more comfortable with Jack and Grace, laughed again "You guys are funny. Okay hog bellies it is. Thank you so much. I was so worried when I woke up and didn't know where I was.

Grace led her to their bedroom and the shower. She showed her where the clothes were in her closet.

"Take anything of hers you want, Chandra. I was going to give them all to the Salvation Army next Christmas, but I'm sure they wouldn't object to me donating them ahead of time.

"I'll see you after you're ready to meet the world again in proper attire."

CHAPTER 4

GRACE WONDERED HOW Chandra's mother was going to react to the news that her daughter was down here in Santa Ana with them. This made her hesitate for a moment before she punched in the number.

The phone rang three times before a voice said, "Hello. This is the Wilson residence. How can I help you?"

Grace almost laughed. *This woman must have worked at a switchboard at some time in her life.*

"Hello, Mrs. Wilson. My name is Grace Hagen. I'd like to speak with you about Chandra. We have ..."

"Oh, just a second, Mrs. Hagen. I'll go get her. She is still in bed. I'll go get her. I'll be right back."

"Oh damn," Grace muttered. "She thinks I want to talk to Chandra. How did that happen?"

It wasn't long before a very nervous mother was back on the line. "Mrs. Hagen, Chandra isn't in her room. She didn't let me know that she was leaving the house. Look, I've got to call around to her friends to see where she is. This is not a normal thing for Chandra to do. Give me your number and I'll have her call you later."