

FINDING HOME



a short read by
JON WEST

An epic journey
through loss, love,
and the promise of
a new era.

FINDING HOME

Sample

Jon West

Hardcover: 979-8-89416-023-8
Paperback: ISBN: 979-8-89416-022-1
Audiobook: ISBN: 979-8-89416-024-5
eBook: 979-8-89416-020-7 (pdf)
eBook: 979-8-89416-021-4 (epub)

Copyright © 2024 Jon West

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electrical, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the copyright owner, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

To request permission, contact the publisher at requests@folk.studio

Published by
FOLK STUDIO 451
San Antonio, Texas
<https://folk.studio>



This book is dedicated to the greatest storyteller of all time, my father. Through his tales, he wove us into our family lore, past, present, and future. He will always live in the hearts and minds of all who knew him. Thanks, Dad.

Jon West

Sample

CONTENTS

Chapter I The Praters	1
Chapter II The Whitaker Home	9
Chapter III Milo	12
Chapter IV Gladys.....	20
Chapter V Richard Elliott Standish, Esq.	32
Chapter VI The Calling.....	37
Chapter VII New York City	41
Chapter VIII The Journey	46
Chapter IX The Good Father	52
Chapter X Dianna Sue	61
Chapter XI Koen Van Haaften	67
Chapter XII Ada.....	77
Chapter XIII Marlow.....	83
Chapter XIV Cyrus Smith	87
Chapter XV Betty and Freddy.....	102
Chapter XVI Evelynn.....	107
Chapter XVII The Glasby's.....	113
Chapter XVIII Christmas Day.....	119
Chapter XIX Finding Home	138

FORWARD

At the dawn of the 20th century, the world teetered on the edge of transformation. The roar of steam engines, the clatter of telegraphs, and the whirl of new machines promised progress—but for many, it came with a cost. It was a time of great upheaval, where old ways gave way to the new, and individuals were left to navigate the unknown: to reconcile their pasts, adapt to a shifting present, and forge futures brimming with possibility. *Finding Home* is the story of such a journey—an odyssey that mirrors the heartbeat of an era.

At its core, *Finding Home* is more than a tale of one boy's trials and triumphs. It is a testament to resilience, to love found in unexpected places, and to the human need for connection even in the face of loss. Jasper P. Whittington III is not just a character; he is a reflection of countless souls at the turn of the century—individuals caught between the old world and the promise of the new. Through Jasper's eyes, we experience the sweeping plains, the thundering locomotives, and the spirit of invention that defined this pivotal moment in history.

As readers, we are invited not just to follow Jasper's journey, but to reflect on our own. *Finding Home* reminds us that even the hardest roads lead somewhere beautiful. That the struggles we endure

shape us. And that sometimes, “home” is not a place, but the people we choose to love and the stories we carry with us.

So open this book, and step into a time of change, a world of promise, and a story that will stay with you long after you turn the last page. Jasper’s odyssey awaits, and it just might inspire you to look at your own journey with new eyes.

Welcome to *Finding Home*.

Sample

CHAPTER I

The Praters

May 31st, 1897

On Sundays, Elisabeth and Lottie Prater always arrived early at Marlow First Christian Church to place fresh flowers in the sanctuary before the morning service. On this occasion, as they approached the entrance, they noticed a woven basket at the door. Sounds of cooing and small grunts were coming from it. Nine-year-old Lottie raced to the basket to look inside. There lay a newborn baby boy wrapped in dirty rags and newspapers.

“Mommy, Mommy! It’s a baby! We found a baby! Can we keep him?” Lottie’s heart poured out.

“Land sakes! What is this?” said Elisabeth. Reaching down for the infant, she noticed a torn piece of paper pinned to the lip of the basket. Jasper P. Whittington III was scribbled on it. “Now, who would abandon a baby like this?”

Her eyes welled with tears when she silently answered her question. Oklahoma Territory was not forgiving of young women who were in an unfortunate way. Leaving an infant at the door of a church was a common and heartbreaking last option for some young unwed mothers wanting to save their baby’s

life. “Can we keep him? He needs us! Oh, look how beautiful he is! He’s perfect! I’m going to name him Basil, after Daddy!”

“He already has a name, sugar,” Elisabeth said, looking at the paper. “And remember, he’s one of God’s children, not a puppy. Let’s take him home, feed him, and clean him up. We’ll talk to Daddy about it.”

She was already falling in love with the baby, but Elisabeth was a pragmatic prairie woman. She already had Lottie and the two boys at home, and her family was just getting by.

“Land sakes,” she whispered.

They gathered up the little boy, placed the fresh flowers in the church, and began the walk home. As they started down the red dirt road, Lottie insisted on carrying the basket but only managed a block until her Mama took over. They completed the remaining three blocks, and by the time the girls got to their front yard, there was a gaggle of neighbor ladies flocking around the baby. A decision was made to feed and clean him up and then discuss options for him. The ladies went home and prepared lunch for their families. They would meet back at the Prater home for tea in the afternoon.

Mother and daughter entered the home through the kitchen. As they walked through the door, the baby boy wailed from hunger and discomfort. Basil Pitt Prater (B.P.) was watering the barn’s livestock (a milk cow and a few chickens) when he heard the cries.

“What the hell was that?” mumbled B.P. He put down the water bucket and headed for the house as the crying continued.

After removing his boots and hanging up his hat, he entered the kitchen and saw his wife and daughter tending to a baby while water was being heated on the stove.

“Lizzy, what do we have here?” he asked.

“This boy was left at the church’s front door, Basil. After lunch, the ladies are stopping by to discuss what needs to be done for the baby’s sake.”

“So you ladies are gonna find a home for it?” asked B.P. as he rubbed his forehead.

“Basil Pitt Prater, he needs a washing, food, and affection. I assume a good Christian man like yourself would be eager to help this child.”

“Oh no . . .” said B.P. as he exhaled.

“Mr. Prater, what are you on about?” Lizzy asked as she fastened a new diaper on the infant.

“When you refer to me as a ‘Good Christian,’ it either costs me money or a good night’s sleep!”

Elisabeth and his daughter stopped what they were doing and blankly stared at him. B.P. cautiously backed out of the kitchen and resumed his chores.

To the women on the street, “in the afternoon” meant one thirty p.m. sharp. It was time enough to feed the family, wash up, and see their men off to the mill, where they would share their stories and a bottle. As the women filed into Lizzy’s parlor, Lottie offered them tea and biscuits. She was learning to be

a gracious hostess and could proudly balance the plate of cookies without one landing on the floor.

After a barrage of compliments and kind nods, the business at hand was breached. Any woman in the group would take in this sleeping boy as their own, but they were also aware of the consequences. It would be a significant burden for any family on their street, both financially and emotionally.

“The Whitaker family has opened an orphan’s home near Tulsa. This is just the circumstance it was established for,” said Ophelia Ottman as she rocked the child.

The Whitaker Home for Wayward Children was established in 1897 by W.T. and Stacy Whitaker to provide a home for orphaned white children of the Indian Territory.

“I’ll talk to the judge about it tomorrow,” said Laura Nicole, the courthouse administration secretary. “We just received some new application forms from the Whitaker Trust Fund.”

“How long of a process is it?” asked Elisabeth.

“Oh, shouldn’t take more than a week,” answered Laura.

“Well, we have ample food and time for him ’til all is arranged. We’ll keep the boy here while you take care of the paperwork,” said Elisabeth as she cleared the teacups.

All the other ladies nodded and agreed.

After all the technical business was finished, it was time to pass around the baby. The parlor was aglow

with love and affection for the boy, and all the adoring women gently held him and spoke to him only as mothers could.

Little Jasper was a lovely child to care for. He would never outright cry and had a perpetual smile. He even slept all night, sharing a room with Lottie. Since there was no crib, they emptied Lottie's bottom dresser drawer and made a bed for him there. On the third morning, Lizzy went to Lottie's room and found Jasper missing. Her heart skipped a beat as she began searching the house for the child. As she entered the kitchen, she saw B.P. nursing him with a warm bottle.

"Do you miss it?" Lizzy asked. She smiled and slipped her arm around his shoulders as they watched Jasper empty the bottle.

"Yeah, but not enough to have another baby. I swear! He's as sweet as cotton candy."

Elisabeth walked to the stove and started coffee and breakfast. She added a few chunks of coal to the low glowing ambers and fanned them. Within half an hour, the sleepy-eyed children had gathered at the kitchen table, hungry and eager to start their day. The twin boys were in the first grade, and Lottie was in her final year, fourth grade. Children in small rural communities didn't have the luxury of a complete education. Childhood ended with the fourth grade. Their families needed them to keep farms and households running.

After breakfast, B.P. went into town to rent a mule to plow a new garden, and the kids headed to school. A knock and a "Yoo-hoo!" came through the Prater's screen door.

“Come on in, Laura! We’re in the kitchen,” yelled Lizzy.

Laura entered and found Lizzy changing Jasper’s diaper. He was smiling ear to ear when a little fountain of tinkle shot up, set off by the cool air. Both women laughed out loud at the sight.

“I spoke to the sheriff. He will inform as many law agencies as possible about Jasper to see if they can find a relative who can take him in. I have everything regarding the Wayward Home paperwork, and it seems fairly easy. We could fill it out together.” The women shared a silent moment of sadness, their hearts torn, knowing Jasper was headed to an institution.

“Well, at least it’s a private institution, unlike those horrid state-run orphanages. He’ll be fine. Who knows? Maybe a family member will see the notifications and claim him,” said Laura. Lizzy couldn’t speak for fear of crying.

“We shall pray for him and put our faith in the good Lord!” said Laura, holding back her own tears.

Four days later, B.P. was waiting on platform one at the Marlow train station. The neighborhood womenfolk were all around him, crying and passing Jasper around for a last goodbye kiss. B.P. had been told to meet with a nurse from the orphanage at the train station in Oklahoma City to turn Jasper over. The nurse would then take the boy to Pryor, just outside Tulsa, to The Whitaker Home for Wayward Children.

The train’s steam whistle blew and the conductor announced, “All aboard for Chickasha, Norman, and OKC!”

B.P. took Jasper in his arms along with a knotted handkerchief packed with a cheese sandwich and an apple. Elisabeth looked into her husband's eyes and tearfully whispered, "See ya at suppertime, honey." B.P. acknowledged her with a wink and a smile. As he turned to board the train, he heard the tearful good-byes come from all the ladies. He didn't dare turn to say anything for fear of showing his own tears.

With a blast of steam, the train released its brakes and slowly chugged north. B.P. took a last look at the women on the platform, tightly huddled together and crying. It was gonna be a tough week.

Now in Oklahoma City, B.P. Prater tipped his hat and smiled at the nurse holding young Jasper. "All aboard! Norman, Chickasha, Marlow, and Duncan," shouted the conductor from platform four.

"Thank you, Mr. Prater, for taking the time to bring us little Jasper," said Nurse Suffring. "We shall be sure to pass on to his future parents how much you and your family cared for him. May the good Lord bless and watch over you and yours."

"Thank you, ma'am," he said. He gave the cooing baby one more pinch on the cheek and smiled, then turned and boarded the train.

B.P.'s emotions were a tangled mess as the train lurched forward. As minutes became hours, he rehashed the conversations that had led them to this point. He felt they were doing the right thing for the boy, but wondered if they could have taken him in. Maybe they could have made room for him. He wasn't THAT much trouble. But he'd get a better education at the wayward home. And with the twins, a new

baby might have driven Lizzy crazy, “taking me with her,” he mumbled, shaking his head. As far as money went, you didn’t have to look far to find a more stable financial situation than theirs. But babies needed more than money.

“Dammit!” he said aloud as the whistle blew and the train clattered down the tracks toward home.

Sample