

Doctor James Earl Pierre Thibodeaux wrote from memory, emptied boxes from the past, to fill unknown years adding to a story known, written to finish Grandparents Rebecca and Nathan Thibodeaux's story. He found closure, love, and life itself.

JACOB THOMAS BUELL'S FARM

By Stephen Hobbs

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Chapter 3

The clicks clack of the keys echoed off the Doctor's office walls and reverberated through time long past.

He paused, looked out the window, and realized the darkness of night had come. Tired and considered quitting as he shuffled the seven pages of type.

There were typographical errors but could be corrected later. The green desk lamp threw shadows on the worn walls, and Doctor James Earl became sentimental as he read the first paragraph of this new type.

Sentimental because it concerned his biological Mother. A mother he never knew, and a childhood filled with love despite two surrogate Mothers. He would pause at times to remember and wipe tears away.

The year was 1890, and fall the season. James Earl's Father, Doctor Jacob Pierre Thibodeaux, left the classroom and walked to his apartment above an art studio on Beale Street. He was depressed and found teaching the medical field was not his calling. Besides, he missed Jacob's farm and the simplicity of living in obscurity. Knowing a private practice would not bring rewards but rather a residence at a hospital. He thought of Shreveport and laid across the bed to nap.

Teaching continued and a new year, and Doctor Jacob peculiarly found love and most unexpected.

Her name was "*Julianne*," and an artist of portraits.

Jacob met her while she painted on the sidewalk in front of the studio. She was younger than he, but age seemed unimportant as the relationship as a rose bloomed and then faded that March date in 1892.

Unwed, Julianne, and Jacob had conceived a child, and at full term, they were eagerly anticipating the birth.

It was overcast and gloomy when Julianne began her labor to birth. Jacob was there to assist with another Doctor.

Hours followed the first labor pain, and then a boy-child was born and laid in the arms of its Mother.

There was this moment, and the staunching of the blood flow was futile. Julianne succumbed to childbirth, holding the child against her breast as her body stilled.

Jacob Pierre wept and took the child from the arms of its Mother as the rose faded.

In the weeks that followed, Jacob knew he needed to return to Shreveport and the farm. The boy-child was in the care of a Nanny. Sally, a woman of color, lived in the apartment and cared for the child. She was given the option of traveling with Jacob and this child named – *“James Earl Pierre*

Thibodeaux." Earl, as that was Julianne's Father's name.

A wire was sent to let Martha Janis know of Jacob's coming and that a surprise waited for all upon his arrival.

In 1892, Doctor Jacob Pierre left New Orleans for the City of Shreveport with his newborn son and a Nanny of color named Sally.

Cedric was waiting on the dock at Shreveport, Louisiana. Alone and anxiously waiting for Jacob Pierre. Cedric was early, and the mare impatient tethered to the single hitch. It was warm as Cedric mopped his bald head of perspiration.

The crowds increased in anticipation of the arrival. Not as large as the steamers on the Mississippi, the packet boat should be here on time, but it was not.

A little after two pm, the boat could be heard and then seen. It was laden with goods and struggling to make headway in the shallow channel. People were waving, and those on shore also.

Two years since Cedric had seen Jacob Pierre, and looking toward the pier as the boat docked, he saw nothing of Jacob.

Jacob Pierre saw Cedric at the edge of the crowd and waved, and there was no response. Then Jacob realized Cedric was expecting a solitary individual.

Disembarking, Jacob Pierre walked with Sally, cradling Jacob's son toward the buggy and Cedric.

Cedric stepped down when he recognized Jacob Pierre. He was all smiles, but his eyes were asking questions soon answered by Jacob.

Cedric took the boy-child after Sally got the nod from Jacob Pierre and was all smiles and giggles as he cuddled the infant.

Cedric returned the child to Sally to load the luggage on board, and when all were seated, untied the mare, climbed to the crowded seat, snapped the reins, and the journey home for Jacob Pierre began.

Cedric did not ask for details of the child's mother on the trip to the farm. Most, if not

all, the conversation was of a time gone by and, of course, the growth of Catherine Annabelle.

It was a Saturday, so Martha Janis was waiting on the porch of Jacob Buell's house. Timber cut and the view to the crossroads visible now. She first saw Cedric and the buggy occupied by more than just Cedric and her brother Jacob Pierre.

Martha Janis was puzzled about the turn at the gate made. Still, Brother Jacob had mentioned a surprise but had not elaborated.

Martha saw the woman of color, but the age from a distance seen could not be Jacob Pierre's wife. Also, apparent, the bundle held in her arms as if a child.

Met at the steps, embraced by her brother, Martha Janis cast an eye toward this woman and child. Then Jacob Pierre took her hand and introductions, and Martha Janis wept as she held this child of Jacob, her nephew.

Cedric left with the buggy to care for it and the mare with supper's promise at Jacob Buell's house and his family. He agreed.

Sally sit quietly as Martha Janis told of this child's mother. Martha was still holding the child, and as it begins to cry, she wondered if she would ever have a child of her own.

Sally took the child to care as Martha and Jacob discussed the need for housing, but that was not a problem as the attic where Matilda lived for years still furnished and shown to Sally. She wiped a tear from memory from when she had nothing in life.

Jacob Pierre would live below, as Martha Janis still lived in Shreveport.

Cedric found Mary in the cellar canning and heard Maybelle singing a hymn of old in the garden. Catherine Annabelle was sitting on a wooden wheelbarrow munching on a late carrot.

Letting Mary know of the invitation to a meal, Mary begins to prepare food. Maybelle came from the garden with Catherine

Annabelle squealing as Maybelle was running, pushing the wheelbarrow before her.

Cedric only told Mary of Jacob Pierre's homecoming and nothing more.

Cedric, followed by Mary, stepped the stones leading to Jacob Buell's house front porch. Maybelle and Catherine were lagging as usual.

Cedric said, "Hello, Sally."

Sally was rocking James Earl on the front porch, and as Cedric turned to introduce Mary, Sally called her by name, and Cedric, surprised, shook his head.

Cedric knew it was possible but was surprised, nonetheless.

Sally remembered Mary from a distant past. A past not wholly revealed to Cedric, and that was alright. Sometimes best left alone in the ages of life. However, Mary did tell him concerning Sally that it was concurrent childhood shared and a plantation east of Biloxi, Mississippi.

Only God knew that Mary and Sally shared the same biological father, but not Mothers, during that troublesome time when some humans were considered less than cattle.

The following Monday, Doctor Jacob Pierre Thibodeaux applied for a local hospital position and immediately accepted as a physician and for a newly opened surgical wing.

Sabrina, a nurse, remembered him fondly from the last time Doctor Thibodeaux was associated with the hospital. They had been seen in each other's company at several functions and the local park before, and with time, the friendship renewed.

Chapter 6

Doctor James Earl knew the above from memory and yellowed pages stored within the box after box. Boxes James Earl had rescued years ago from the house of Jacob Thomas Buell.

On the day of his father's funeral in 1925, James Earl had rummaged through the fallen rooms and found a closet filled with wood and fiberboard boxes. Everything removed regardless of worth. It filled the rear floorboard to the roof of Father Jacob Pierre Thibodeaux's 1915 Chevrolet 490. The boxes were unloaded at the depot in Shreveport, Louisiana, and shipped by rail to Lawrence, Kansas, as well as an old ornate desk. Other pieces of furniture were left behind as most were aged but reliable if one was in need.

James Earl left the Chevrolet's crank with the station master as he did not wish to drive the automobile a distance. The stationmaster asked of its disposal, and

James Earl wrote him a slip of ownership and boarded the train northbound. The man was appreciative.

James Earl knew much to go through with many boxes. Most were receipts from the farm—clippings from a newspaper but sadly not much concerning Grandmother Rebecca Catherine or her adoptive Mother, Janis Belle. James Earl was afraid the progressive for the Thibodeaux family might be lost forever. Unaware of another box filled with Aunt Martha Janis's writings that detailed that period, wrapped in joy and tied with sadness.

Once again, James Earl regressed in remembrance.

Sitting on the porch of the main house as the new year of 1921 begin, Doctor Jacob Pierre, still weak from his illness, listened to the rhythm of Sally's rocking. Sally aged now in as much as himself but her much more. She was almost totally without sight and

seldom left the porch or house without guidance.

Sally was humming a hymnal song, suddenly stopped, and said, "Doctor Thibodeaux, you alright?"

"I am fine, Sally," Jacob replied

"Making sure you had not slipped off to glory," Sally replied.

They both laughed at the thought, but within that year, Sally slipped away to glory.

As with Matilda and Cedric, Sally was taken across the Red River and buried in the Cane Plantation color cemetery.

James Earl had made the arrangements and saw to the burial along with appropriate markers for the three. After all, this woman he bonded with long ago noticed his upbringing for four years and beyond. He wept at the gravesite and wondered about his birth mother. James Earl would ask of his father, but some other time as Father was slowly aging to the point of not troubling.

Catherine Annabelle had long moved to Baton Rouge to be with Maybelle and her husband. There, Mother Mary found and busy baking as Catherine Annabelle tended to customers. One that was constant and a man of the cloth for a local black congregation. A bachelor and a courtship issued between him and Catherine Annabelle.

James Earl remembered from memory, but a journey would fill other pages that would take months to complete.

Jacob Pierre, living now with Martha Janis in the City of Shreveport, as there was no one to care for him at the farm, and James Earl helped move him one fall afternoon. They paused to look back at Jacob Thomas Buell, at the crossroads beyond the gate, and Janis Belle's dream and the main house seem to be weeping.

Martha Janis would still spend weekends along with her brother at the main home, but time took its toll on the farm.

In Lawrence, Kansas, Doctor James Earl received word that his father was slowly leaving this life at another hospital. A train from Kansas City to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, took time, but in time for James Earl to say his earthly farewells. It was July 12, 1925.

The grandson of Tim Aly cared for the body of Jacob Pierre Thibodeaux. Although a private service, there was a large gathering. Jacob Pierre Thibodeaux was laid to rest in the knoll with the panorama view alongside his Grandmother Janis Belle.

Martha Janis never spent another night at the farm. Too many memories and the quiet too overwhelming. Also, the sounds from the attic and the porch were much.

Martha Janis wrote of her gift as a study for others to decipher and analyze in her last decade of life. She knew but never understood the reasons she could see both the future and the past in detail.

Doctor James Earl returned to Lawrence, Kansas, and resumed his medical practice. Seldom did he hear from Aunt Martha Janis. Then one day, it was as if he would never,

and a letter would come in scribble script as her being well and still living in Shreveport, and then two years after Father's death, nothing.

Martha Janis approached after brother Jacob Pierre's death, and a buyer was interested in the farm. She and James Earl were the legal heirs. John Thomas, Emily, and Daniel's son would also be, but whether he was still living was unknown. He had been seen in and around Baton Rouge, Louisiana, by Maybelle and her husband, but not recently. Emily, Daniel's widow, had vanished, and even Katie Danielle knew not of her mother's whereabouts. Someone had mentioned New Orleans, Louisiana, but that was at the turn of the new century. Probably, Emily lived no longer.

Martha Janis contacted James Earl, but there was no reply.

The main house and property conditions were in ruins except for the house of Daniel and Emily.

On the rise west and enclosed by a wrought iron fence where the family laid

remained untouched. There it was kept pristine by a perpetual agreement with Arthur Aly, the grandson of Tim Aly. Tim first cared for the family on February 22, 1868.

In Lawrence, James Earl met a Nurse who currently served in the Army Medical Corps. Mary Wadsworth had come to the hospital for a clinical study in tropical diseases.

She was assigned to Fort Riley, Kansas, some two hours from Lawrence, Kansas. James Earl found Mary's vocation exciting and, although he older by a decade, found the woman pleasant. The courtship began.

James Earl had never considered marriage at forty years of age but rather the hindrance as the courtship continued into the mid-1930s.

Both he and Mary busy in their fields of expertise, and several times, Mary would be gone for months at a time, either the Fort or overseas.

Estranged from the immediate family for a decade, Doctor James Earl was unaware of Jacob Thomas Buell's farm and its demise.

Doctor James Earl never heard from Aunt Martha Janis again and assumed she had legally sold the farm in the late-1920s. Unaware that Aunt Martha no longer lived and was buried next to Jacob Pierre Thibodeaux.

Doctor James Earl and Mary Wadsworth were married on June 1, 1935, in a quiet ceremony. She had received orders for an overseas assignment. The marriage was one to bond a friendship more so than a family makes. Six months later, Mary was in the Philippines.

James Earl sent a letter to Aunt Martha Janis to let her know of the marriage, and the message returned. Worried, James Earl contacted the local paper, who, in turn, called Arthur Aly, who answered James Earl's question.

Aunt Martha Janis had passed eight years earlier and placed beside her brother, Jacob Pierre, in the family plot.

James Earl was stunned, but Aunt Martha Janis was of age and, although unexpected, nonetheless grief-stricken by the news.

More stunning was the decline of the family as in remaining relatives.

Sister Emily Jan had married a man with Wilson's surname while attending college and medical in psychology. In 1930 or 1931, James Earl lost the whereabouts of Emily Jan as he tried to recall.

Mary had let James Earl know she had safely arrived in the Philippines. It was a terrible assignment but durable. James continued with life as if marriage itself was just a convenience that lasted for a season. Then, early in the 1940s, Doctor James moved his practice to Denver, Colorado.

Doctor James Earl also unaware that Caddo Parish had sought his whereabouts after Martha Janis's death.

Jacob Thomas Buell's legal last will dictated that any living relative was entitled to the farm. Soon after, with no contact, the

Parish obtained the property in 1928, and it became a pauper farm for the less fortunate.

Doctor James Earl knew his memory was limited, and Collette Anne suggested a trip to see his roots' land.

James Earl knew it would be lonely and the distance far, but he had the time and funds.

Unaware that she was the daughter of an Irishman and a Jamaica mother being such light skin that her ancestry was not definite upon first seeing her. Collette Anne often wondered about her heritage.

James Earl was thinking of asking Collette Anne to travel with him. He knew there might be questions, but she was only a decade younger, and his French origin not purely Caucasian. They could pass as siblings. Collette Anne had no ties to bind after her engagement ended when her fiancé died at Corregidor in March 1945. A year later, James Earl notified that his wife Mary could not be found and assumed K.I.A.

James Earl asked, and Collette Anne accepted with anticipation. James Earl suggested they go as siblings with their relationship as to life on the road. She agreed, but she was in love with James Earl Pierre Thibodeaux.

Collette Anne promised herself not to rush love but allow love to flourish quietly.

In the meantime, and before traveling, more boxes needed to be opened to ensure nothing known is hidden.

Curious, a note from Grandmother Rebecca concerning a metal box, a wooden stile located on the farm, and the box hidden below. That note piqued both James Earl as well as Collette's interest. They placed the scribbled paper on the inside of a folder, so not forgotten.

Winter still on the Rockies west of Denver and the air cold as James Earl and Collette Anne continued to search through mounds of paper. Both decided late spring for their trip, considering the roads. James Earl's car would be suitable and comfortable. James Earl noticed Collette Anne sitting closer as

they rummaged box after box but dismissed it as necessary to share finds.

Each find was chronologically listed as to time and whom. A checklist when this trip made to find roots buried reached its goal. The list growing as spring came, summer, and details got from the last page as the final dusty box showed its depth and bottom. They find the place of burial of Pierre Thibodeaux, Father of Daniel, and Nathan Thibodeaux. Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and a Catholic Cemetery. The note in the handwriting of Jacob Pierre, James Earl's Father.

It was as if waiting for birth or the sunrise on a cold night to bring the warmth, and then both James Earl and Collette Anne sit quietly, knowing the task was not ending but beginning.

Twenty-three years earlier, northwest of Shreveport, Louisiana, fall of 1929, a young couple stood by hallowed ground and thought of those who shared a surname. Maybe when they had a little more sunshine in life, they would find the family history

connection, if any, engraved in the names and epitaphs.

But, they had some work to do at a house close to a pond for the moment. Long abandoned but built with skill, they had pried the structure from the brush and overgrowth and allowed to live in as overseers of the farm for Shreveport's poorest.

The large house across the field and close to the main road were torn apart but remained partially intact and furnished with worn items.

Small structures to provide temporary shelters for those who came to stay until life bettered littered the front yard. Each one-room house was built from the lumber of the sod house that once stood below the main house. And some lumber from the main house as in siding for walls.

The couple unaware of those who once graced this land physically but rather spiritually. The woman of Cajun heritage knew of those who lingered in familiar places and was acceptable to this presence unseen.

As the couple walked hand in hand, it was cold and the month of October. She, with child, had not told the father. Life troublesome without adding to, she would wait for a moment in time.

Later, standing in the garden that sustained those who came to live for a time, they spoke of sitting roots around the house by the pond.

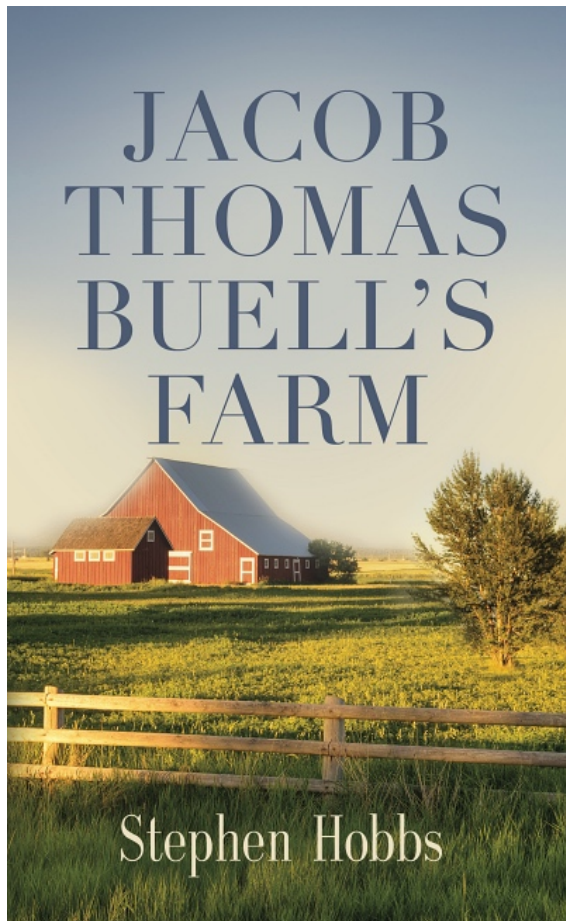
The Parish agreed and subdivided the property for financial gain. Sidney, or "*Sid*," as Jody lovely called her husband purchased two acres around what once was Daniel and Emily Thibodeaux's house, including the pond.

William's farm was sold to a beef producer for raising calves to market and grazing pasture. The fence ran along the back of Sidney's two acres. The stile long rotted was removed for new fencing,

Unknown to Sidney and Jody, they and this unborn child would meet a direct descendent of those who once called this piece of Caddo Parish home. But two

decades and three years must go past before that reunion.

In the meantime, life continued, and a son was born, then a daughter, and the land laid barren around Daniel and Emily's home. The garden was a bright spot and then approached by the buyer of the forty acres behind them to help purchase Jacob Thomas Buell's original farm's property and agreed and a lease for its grazing and hay usage. Sidney and Jody aged, and a life filled their cup with blessings.



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