



From Homeless to Heaven

Jeanne Ann Off

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From Homeless to Heaven is an encouraging Christian novel set in the American West, whose wide spaces make room for faith to grow.

In Jeanne Ann Off's inspirational novel *From Homeless to Heaven*, hard work and faith lead to being born again.

Cody is a rancher who meets the challenges of working with cattle in subzero temperatures. Acknowledging his limits, he seeks help to work the ranch. Alan, a man from skid row who is trying to escape his past and hates the church, arrives. But Alan's doubts about God are challenged by the support he finds in his new home, and among his new community.

Alan struggles, at first, to find his footing in this new world, even threatening to leave early on. Cody's family, and their faith, wins him over; he sits with his questions about God and faith, and considers accepting God's plans for his salvation. Conservative theology dominates: faith is expressed most clearly in Alan's decision to be baptized on a Sunday, during church.

Cody and Alan's ranch work is covered with details of cows giving birth, illness, and the threat of wildfires. Early in the novel, Alan is shot in the arm when he's out caring for the calves. Such violence adds a sense of mystery to the novel, setting up a showdown for Alan in which his past has implications for his soul. But small moments dominate the story, whose rugged Western energy is used to speak to the power of God.

This episodic narrative begins deep in the winter. Though its set in Colorado's mountains, the novel reads as if it could take place anywhere in the West. Fascinating information about rural living comes in as Cody and Alan work the land, struggling to make hay, milk the cows, and fix problems using ingenuity and skill. Still, the copious details about ranch life become tedious as they extend to cover unnecessary information, as of the dangers of bed bugs, or with a Wikipedia article describing how lightning forms.

But the novel's style is too matter-of-fact. Its character development and descriptions are minimized; most of the cast is unchanged by the novel's end, and secondary characters of interest play clichéd roles, as with a widow who wins Alan's heart and a fiery pastor who delivers familiar teachings. And there are few surprises: by the end of the book, Alan becomes the man who God wanted him to be, taking responsibility for his past, reconnecting with a loved one, and finding strength in forgiveness.

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JEREMIAH ROOD (November 18, 2021)

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