



NO WAY UP



MARY CONNEALY



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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

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No Way Up is about parents trying to make their children love each other, take pride in the family ranch, and be devoted to each other. Because of this, I dedicate this book to my mom, Dorothy. No, she doesn't own a vast ranch and insist we all live under her roof. Quite the contrary. I think she was FINE with us growing up and moving out of her small farmhouse.

But she's the mother of eight children who have found faith and good lives of our own. We are all accomplished people—perhaps the author, me, least of all. And we all love her because . . . how could we not?

She is the sweetest lady on earth. She's unfailingly generous. She now has eight sons- and daughters-in-law, twenty-eight grandchildren, ten grandchildren-in-law, and thirteen great-grandchildren (I think I counted right, but who knows?).

Mom, along with Dad, raised us with the beautiful legacy of faith, simply by living it themselves and loving us all through the ups and downs.

She'll protest when she reads this, give any credit for how we all came out to us, and speak with wonder of how she could be so lucky to have such wonderful children, as if she had nothing to do with it. That sweet modesty is part of what we all love so much about her.

Thank you, Mom, for the legacy of love.





SKULL GULCH, NEW MEXICO TERRITORY
NOVEMBER 1880

The steep sides of the pass into the canyon pressed down on Heath Kincaid until he could hardly breathe. Though it was a blustery November day, a sheen of sweat broke out on his forehead. It surprised him because Heath knew mountains, and he knew tight places.

He rode behind Chance Boden, the owner of this vast land grant, and John Hightree, the foreman of the Cimarron Ranch, and two other men brought up the rear riding single file, their aim to fetch the cattle that had gone in here. They passed the busted-down gate Chance had put up to keep cattle out of the rugged, grassless canyon.

“That fence was stronger than the backbone of the Rockies.” Chance looked in disgust at the gateposts that just yesterday blocked the entrance. “That cantankerous bull shouldn’t’ve been able to knock it down.”

He led his men around the splintered lumber. “Let’s make short work of getting ’em out.”

Heath was just passing the ruins of the gate when he heard the rumble. Right overhead. Only one thing made that sound.

“Avalanche! Run!” Heath reined in his stallion so hard it reared. In horror he glanced up as he whirled his horse. He saw tumbling rocks knock debris loose.

The rockslide grew, picked up speed. Those ugly rolling stones, raining down the side of the narrow neck of the entrance to the canyon, were heading right for them. Heath’s horse neighed in fear and jerked at the reins.

The first rocks pelted them. A sharp stone slashed Heath’s temple. The roar grew louder, promising more were coming. As one, the men charged back the way they’d come—out of the bottleneck canyon and away from the vicious hail.

Heath was third in line. Chance Boden and John were now behind him. Bent low over his stallion’s neck, Heath looked back to see the rocks pounding down around their heads.

A big one slammed into John’s shoulder and nearly unseated him. Chance was barely visible in the dense cloud of dirt just behind John.

Heath burst out of the canyon neck and wheeled his buckskin. The other two cowpokes were just ahead of him. A second later, John charged out of a cloud, blood coursing down the side of his face and from one arm. He reached Heath’s side and pivoted. They both watched, gasping for breath in the grainy air.

Nothing.

The biggest rocks were down, but silt and gravel still rained and the passageway was choked with dust.

“Chance didn’t make it out!” Heath hurled himself off his stallion. He plunged into the blinding grit. A rock knocked at him and stung, but the worst of the avalanche was over. It didn’t matter anyway; he’d be switched if he stood safely back while

Chance might be dying. Chance's horse suddenly appeared out of the dust. Riderless.

The horse nearly trampled Heath. Once he'd dodged the poor critter, he stormed on, stumbling over rubble. The rocks were deeper as he got farther into the pass. He fell over a chunk of granite and landed, tearing his knees and hands. Down low he could see better, and just ahead of him he spotted the sleeve of a blue shirt. Its color stood out against the chalky stone. Extending from that sleeve was a limp, bleeding hand.

"I found him!" He crawled forward and tossed a stone just as John Hightree nearly tripped over him. Heath and John went to work clearing the debris.

The two other cowhands were only a pace behind. It heartened Heath to know he worked with men who'd risk an avalanche to save one of their own.

The four of them heaved rocks, uncovering Chance as fast as they could.

The boss's face was slick with crimson, peeking through the gravel and dirt that coated him. A goose egg rose up on his forehead.

They were all bleeding somewhere. Heath couldn't see if Chance was dangerously hurt or just knocked cold.

Then Heath tossed aside a slab of rock almost too big to lift and saw the brutal wound on the boss's leg. One of the men uttered a harsh oath. Heath spoke silently to the Lord.

Gushing blood. Worse yet, a jagged bone stuck out of Chance's pant leg, just below his knee.

A wound that always crippled—and often killed.

"Mike," John said, taking charge, "get Chance's horse in here. Windy, gather up the rest of the horses. Mike and I will get Chance in the saddle. Heath, you run for town."

The two men vanished into the grit.

"No!" Heath had never disobeyed an order from John in his

life, but this time he had to. “I need to see if he’s got an artery bleeding. I’ve worked with some wounds like this while scouting for the Army at a fort in Montana.”

Chance would for sure lose his lower leg. But it was so close to the knee, Heath didn’t see how he could tie a tourniquet anywhere but above the knee. But if it didn’t get a tourniquet, and skilled medical hands took over, Chance might keep the knee joint, and that made a big difference in a man’s life.

Heath whipped his knife out of its scabbard at his waist and cut Chance’s right pant leg away. He took precious moments, when he should be tightening a cinch around Chance’s thigh, to see if the bleeding had a pulse. If it did, it was life-threatening and a tourniquet couldn’t be avoided.

“I don’t feel an artery bleeding,” Heath said with relief. “I might be able to patch him up, but we’ve got to clean the wound first. To do that, we have to get him out of this gritty air.”

Muttering, not concealing his doubts worth a lick, John picked up Chance’s shoulders while Heath got his legs, flinching at the rough handling. They carried him across the stone-cluttered ground into clean air just as Windy came up with all the horses except for Chance’s, which Mike had caught and was leading back.

“Lay him down, and then I can clean him up.” He and John positioned him. “Get the canteens off the horses. We’ve got to wash the dirt out of the wound.”

Windy, Mike, and John rushed to do as Heath ordered.

Heath prayed for God to guide his hands, because these men were putting their trust in him and he didn’t want to fail anyone.

“There’s a spring back a couple hundred yards.” John handed over the first canteen. “We can get all the water you want.”

“Get ready to run for more as soon as one empties. Washing it out could head off infection and that might make the difference between life and death for the boss. And I need something

to use for splints. Even a couple of heavy sticks are better than nothing.”

Heath hunched over the cruel wound. Dirt and gravel were all through it, even beneath the broken bone. Not a speck of that dirt could stay or Chance would be in a world of trouble.

Ignoring the other men, Heath worked tirelessly on Chance’s leg. He didn’t know how much water he used or how many times the men ran for more. They had five canteens, and all Heath knew was that when he reached up for more water, it was always there.

Time stretched on. Whether minutes or hours, Heath didn’t know. Chance’s leg bled until Heath was scared for his boss’s life, but he went on cleaning. He remembered the doctor at the fort had carbolic acid on hand to treat open injuries, to stave off suppuration. Heath wished he had some now. Hopefully the doctor in Skull Gulch was a good one who kept up with modern methods.

Finally, Heath couldn’t see a single speck of dirt, nor the tiniest piece of gravel. Now he had to deal with the jagged protruding bone. “John, hold down his thigh.”

John gave Heath a hard look before he settled both hands above Chance’s knee. When John had a firm grip, Heath, his hands coated in blood, caught Chance’s ankle and made a ruthless move to straighten the leg. The bone snapped back under the skin.

Chance shouted in pain, the first sign of life.

The cry was horrible, but he was alive.

Having ripped his shirt off his back, Heath turned it clean-side out, folded it with lightning moves, then wrapped the shirt tight around Chance’s roughly reset upper shin.

“Did anyone find something to splint this with?”

Two flat pieces of board were thrust into his line of sight. “Perfect.”

So perfect he was stunned.

“I found them on the broken fence, Heath,” Windy said.

“All of you—give me your shirts.” They were handed to Heath one by one, leaving the men dressed in their woolen undershirts. Heath twisted them into ropes of cloth and bound the splints so they wouldn’t slip.

“This is tight enough I hope it stops the bleeding, but without cutting off circulation. It’s the only chance we have of saving his knee. There just isn’t room below the knee and above the break for a tourniquet.”

Heath hoped he hadn’t missed any filth and was now binding it inside Chance’s leg. If he was, infection was guaranteed. It was probably guaranteed anyway.

“Are you done?” Mike asked through clenched teeth.

“Yep.”

“Is there more you can do for him, Heath?” John sounded hopeful and skeptical at the same time.

“That doctor in the Army taught me to look for a severed artery, and if none are cut, to clean the wound and use a bandage, because a tourniquet cuts off circulation and everything below the tourniquet will have to be amputated. If an artery is bleeding, you’ve got no choice. But Chance’s break didn’t cut through one. On the battlefield I’d do this, then get the man to the doctor. Someone smarter than me has to take over now.” Heath was mighty sorry to admit that.

“Go fetch Doc Garner in Skull Gulch. You might be able to tell him things the rest of us can’t. Have the doc meet us at the house. And tell Cole and Sadie to get home,” John said.

Heath hated the second part of the order. He was to be the one to tell Sadie and Cole the terrible news. They’d always remember him for that. If they decided to kill the messenger, it’d be him they’d kill. But John was not to be disobeyed, not ever, unless a man had a mighty good reason and talked fast.

Heath turned and raced for his horse, glad to the depths of his soul that he'd found the money to buy the fleet-footed, high-endurance quarter horse. The powerful stallion leapt into a gallop from the first pace. Heath jumped over rocks and dodged boulders with one goal in mind—to get to the doctor and bring him to the Cimarron Ranch in time to save Chance Boden, one of the finest men he'd ever known.

It didn't slow him down, but Heath's stomach twisted with regret as he thought of Sadie. Her father might be dying. The very best they could hope for was an amputated leg.

If the broken leg didn't kill Chance, the surgery to save his life or the infection that resulted from it very well might.

And he was the one who had to tell Sadie all of that.