

The Calendar

An Excerpt

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CHAPTER 1

Everything Pals

Of the many truly great things about fishing, among the best was that it never required a lot of energy or equipment to do it right. A bobber, a cane pole, and worms for bait were more than adequate for a child of Texas on a barely-flowing creek in the late evening of a perfect summer day. And every summer day, with its absence of school, was indeed perfect for two young neighbors in rural Texas in the late fifties.

Toby Anderson had held a pole in his hands since long before he could remember, though the extent of time he was capable of remembering was limited. After all, he was just short of nine years old. And his fishing pal – his *everything* pal – was a pal in the very strictest sense of the word. So what if Cassie Blalock was a girl? Toby had never really thought about it one way or another. Cassie was simply his buddy. She could deliver a right jab or jump a fence with the best of them. And in this part of Johnson County, Texas, the “best of them” meant Toby. At ninety pounds and a height of four feet and eight inches, he was on the big side for his age. The boy never bullied but he also never backed down. He placed the right fear of God in every boy his age and a great many that were older. And Cassie enthusiastically matched him tit for tat and mischief for mischief. Cassie was six inches shorter and over thirty pounds lighter, but her smaller frame belied her physical and emotional toughness. Aside from size, distinctions between the pair were hard to arrive at because the children were in lock-step in every endeavor. Wherever you found one, you found the other – always.

It was August and the heat was of the sort you always heard about in the

Lone Star State in the late summer – eight hundred degrees and humidity of two hundred percent – perfect for fishing. Oh, you seldom caught fish when it was like this, but – and this was another wonderful thing about fishing – it required water. So when the fish weren't biting, stripping down to your skivvies and cannonballing into the water was a satisfactory replacement. Though most creek beds and stock tanks near the children's homes were mere patches of scorched, cracked earth by this point in the year, this particular creek constantly flowed. It had a pool that always held the water fed into it from springs. Beside the stream hung the requisite rope swing of the proper length to elevate you to the perfect altitude for a drop into the refreshing water with a ker-splash.