

Rainn on My Parade

by

LoRee Peery

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Dedication

Dedicated to my grandchildren—uniquely created every one. “For Thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst weave me in my mother’s womb.” —Psalm 139:13

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.” —
Jeremiah 1:5

And to Yvonne, a dear friend whose use of her gifts is praiseworthy.

Also, a special thanks to Julee Lowe, stained glass artist housed in Lincoln's Haymarket Burkholder Project, for graciously answering my questions. Any errors or misrepresentations of this art form are solely mine.

Praise for LoRee Peery

Moselle's Insurance is a story that captures your heart through Christ. It is set in a small town in Platteville, Nebraska with small town drama. This story shows us that God loves us and wants only the best for us even if we don't know what the best is. This story is a true love story of God. I loved the characters and the setting of the town.

Reviewed by Wendy
Happily Ever After Reviews 5 Tea Cups!

This is my first experience with Ms. LoRee Peery but I hope it will not be my last. She has a distinct way of writing which absolutely gripped my attention. Her characters are dynamic, vibrant people who love God and, previously had loved each other. ...

Ms. Peery's secondary characters are also clearly defined. It gives the impression that we, the readers, are there inside the novel with them. Her views on Christianity and serving God are presented in a concise, understandable way which an unbeliever could read and enjoy. She gets her point across without being overly preachy.

I highly recommend this book by Ms. Peery. It will certainly be a hit and is written so that anyone can read it. Look for this author to obtain high recognition.

Brenda Talley ,
The Romance Studio 5 Hearts

1

"You will not win without a fight." Geneva Carson jammed the end of the flashlight into the waistband of her pajama bottoms, and started to climb.

Meee-owwww. The matted, long-haired calico studied Geneva through half-closed lids, looking way down. Its eyes shone like yellow mirrors, caught in the light's beam. With a blink, it bounded to a higher branch, clearly visible amidst the thinning leaves of fall.

"Come on, you silly little thing." She shook her head. *Unbelievable. Talking to a cat instead of getting ready for work.*

She directed the flashlight beam into the cottonwood limbs high off the ground. "Here, kitty, kitty."

I jumped right in, didn't I, Lord, without taking the time to ask for help, as usual.

She called herself nuts, but it sure was fun to be climbing a tree after so many years. She found her balance on a sturdy limb and continued to climb.

What would her daughter say if she saw this fiasco? Moselle would have a fit at such foolishness. Geneva pulled out the flashlight to make sure the quarry remained in sight. "You are not going to keep making that sad racket...And quit climbing higher," she informed the stray cat.

She looked down while attempting to secure the flashlight again. *Uh-oh. Oooo, I've done it up good this time.* Geneva swallowed. A big gulp that got caught somewhere on its way down. Her knees wavered at the realization of just how high she had climbed. She was a good twenty feet off the ground.

"Geneva, what in the world are you doing in that tree?" her sister yelled from the back door.

"Good question, Lanae," she answered through the branches. "And I've got a good answer. A cat."

I may be fifty years old, but so impetuous I'm high in a tree?

Her nerveless fingers let go and the flashlight tumbled to the ground. Then she took a death grip on the nearest limb. "Uh, Sis? I think I'm in trouble."

"I think you're right. I'm calling nine-one-one."

"Don't bother. Call—" The door slammed.

"Now you've done it, cat. I wanted her to call Eric. I can hear the sirens already."

The words were seconds out of her mouth when a wail blew from the Platteville Volunteer Fire Station downtown. She scrunched her eyes shut, hoping it was all a wild dream. When she opened them, she got scared. *What if I fall?*

She could find herself in the hospital and where would that leave *Frivolities*? Her brand-new business would go belly-up. God had presented the idea for the fanciful *Frivolities* to her and her sister. Geneva was determined to make it work, especially with Lanae battling hepatitis C and Moselle on the brink of marriage. *What timing.*

At the thought of her daughter, Geneva said a subconscious prayer that Moselle's fiancé, Eric, would be the fireman coming to her rescue.

Get a grip, woman, and act your age.

The sirens drew close. She soon heard activity below, but she kept her eyes clamped shut.

"Hold on, Ms. Carson. Don't be scared," a disembodied voice that didn't belong to her future son-in-law spoke from below. "Just hold on."

"I assure you, I'm too scared to let go." Geneva's voice quivered. But she couldn't help smiling at her predicament.

The extension ladder whirred softly and creaked as it reached for the top branches of the tree.

She squeezed her eyes tighter.

"I'm right behind you now."

"Thank you, Lord."

"Not God, just me." The firefighter chuckled.

Her eyes popped open when she felt him close behind. Thankful for the cropped-pajama bottoms she wore instead of a nightgown, Geneva frowned at the unexpected shiver as she attempted to place the voice.

"Whenever you're ready, just let go."

"Thought you told me to hold on."

"Well, I'm here to catch you, now."

She caught the humor in his voice. And hated it.

"Oh, good grief. I'm too heavy for anybody to catch me." She lowered her eyes to half mast.

"Spunky, most likely," came from under his breath.

She doubted he meant for her to hear.

Is that professional behavior? Well, that's pretty nervy of the guy. But then again, I am caught in a tree. She snickered, wondering if she was hysterical. She tried for a deep breath but it turned into a gulp around her sternum. "Are you sure I can let go?"

"Geneva, trust me." That popped her eyes wide

open.

The confident urging voice and the use of her first name drew enough courage to peer downward.

Rainn Harris.

And he was way too close for comfort.

Eric would never live this down at the firehouse. His future mother-in-law rescued from a tree, by his buddy.

She remembered her first look at him. Rainn was several years older than Eric, but they'd become fast friends when they met at University. Geneva may have heard Rainn's name a time or two before Eric started working on Moselle's loft, but she hadn't any reason to pay attention. Since then, she'd seen him with Eric many times.

Rainn probably knew more about her than she did him.

Before she could fathom any further thought, Geneva let go and found herself wrapped in the strongest arms and pressed against the strongest chest imaginable.

I'd climb the tree again if this firefighter would come for me.

Young, strong, handsome Rainn Harris.

Lanae would love being in this situation. *Now she'll tease me until one of us meets our Maker.*

Geneva braved another sneak peek to discover Rainn wasn't looking at her. But to his credit, he was trying to hide that half smile that lingered at one corner of his mouth.

Enfolded in his arms while the ladder descended, she discovered that she wanted the ride to last. And last.

All too soon, the whirring jerked to a gentle halt.

Geneva's feet searched for solid purchase, but her legs didn't find that foundation at first. Rainn kept her close, half carrying and half leading her over to Lanae, who stood with mouth agape.

Before releasing his grasp on Geneva's arms, Rainn bent to search her face. Thanks to full daylight, he'd get an eye full.

Just in time for the whole neighborhood to witness my folly. Me, held in the arms of a man twelve years younger.

"Steady now?"

Disconcerted as usual by his premature gray hair and handsome face, she attempted to meet his gaze head-on.

"Felt me shake, huh?"

His grin spread.

"I'm just fine," she announced with false bravado.

"Guess it's the cat's turn, then." Rainn pivoted and went up the ladder again.

She checked out his muscular physique, sighed inside at his strength, and the protective way he had held her against his chest.

At full extension, the ladder reached the cat, way too high up the tree for Geneva's comfort. The cat was quiet in Rainn's folded arms. She caught herself eyeing the man rather than the cat. *Holy macaroni, what is wrong with me?*

A motor on the fire truck kicked in, and the calico struggled for release. Rainn gave its neck a gentle tap and set it on a low branch. In a calico flash, the cat streaked down the tree and away from the humans.

So much for all their efforts.

"Mother, how could you?" Moselle joined the melee. She must have run all the way from Main Street. "I can see the headline now: 'Platteville's newest

business owner rescued from tree.”

Geneva studied Rainn’s precise movements, and wondered just how hot his extra fire gear had to be—pants and boots and hat. It was hard not to be distracted.

“Don’t be so dramatic,” she answered Moselle.

“I would never consider climbing that huge old cottonwood again!” Moselle lambasted. “Remember how I got caught in that tree when I was in junior high? Dad had to coax me down for what seemed like hours.”

“I remember. Your face was the color of bread dough.”

“So, what in the world were you thinking?”

“Guess I wasn’t. Thinking. That goofy cat woke me up and wouldn’t shut up. I just reacted.”

“Went after it with gusto, just like you do anything you set your sights on,” Lanae interjected.

“Well, I hope you’ve learned your lesson,” Moselle added in a parental tone. “You aren’t young anymore. You can’t just jump into things like that.”

“How can I forget my age with you constantly reminding me? Besides, this time I jumped up instead of into a mess.”

Moselle dropped her gaze. “Mom, I’m sorry. Just being protective, I guess.”

“Humph.” Geneva snorted. “I’m not ready for role reversal. Let me do my own thing, OK?”

“You’re right.” Moselle’s green eyes flashed. She held out her arms. “Truce, Mom?”

“Sure thing, kid.”

Geneva pulled out of the hug, and her mouth went dry. Rainn hadn’t worn his turnout coat when he climbed after her. Now she stood mesmerized while he

yanked down the suspenders and stepped out of the pants. How long had it been since she'd watched a man step out of his clothes? Way too long. And the clothes this man wore fit him way too fine.

Rainn caught her look, noticeably suppressing a grin.

She couldn't will her gaze away. Something huge and dry lodged in her throat. When he headed toward her, she stood riveted in place, unable to break eye contact.

She forgot they weren't alone. Her heart seemed to quit beating along with the breath she held.

"Are you over your shakiness?"

His warm voice made her feel as secure as she'd been while in the tree with him.

"Have to be. Now. The earth is solid beneath my feet."

"Alrighty, then." He drew a breath and acted like he wanted to say more, but he focused on the uppermost branches instead.

The fire truck started its warning beep for reverse gear.

She finally released a huge breath.

Rainn rolled his gaze back to Geneva. "Critter seems quiet now."

"I hope it stays that way. I need to open *Frivolities*, or the coffee crowd will be gathered on the sidewalk. Thanks."

"No problem." He stepped back, giving her that same direct look.

I'm long past thirty. Isn't he supposed to respect his elders or something?

She remembered she was standing there in broad daylight, wearing her sheer lace cami. The intense heat

of embarrassment slammed into her. She'd worn pajamas in public when she was young, but thanks to gravity, the bumps and lumps revealed in day's light called for retreat. Now!

She tried to add a gracious comment. "Coffee's on the house at *Frivolities*. And, let me know if I can return the favor."

He held her gaze a couple heartbeats longer. Then he shot her a full grin that spread radiating lines from eyes and mouth.

That smile erased the lack of sleep caused by the cat. Geneva grinned back and basked in the idea that Rainn treated her as an attractive woman.

"If your store was nothing but a coffee shop I'd be there every chance I get. But do you know how hard it is for me to walk into your doodad place?" He turned and leaped onto the truck. "However, I try to please a lady whenever I can. Looks like you've got a new customer."

He must like her cami. But he'd been a gentleman and kept his gaze on her face. She sucked in her gut and stood so erect her shoulder blades almost touched.

Not that Rainn Harris would stay in Platteville long. He'd only recently arrived, and once the stained glass restoration for the church windows was done, he'd be gone.

She heaved another sigh; blew it out with resignation, before turning back to the reality of life.

Rainn. There had to be an interesting story behind such a name.

All femininity rushed to the forefront when she again recalled their proximity in the tree.

Lord, help me focus here, please. I don't have time to notice a good lookin' guy like Rainn. I have to concentrate on

Frivolities!

Geneva reminded herself of what she and Lanae repeatedly told Moselle: "It's what's inside a man that counts, not his physique." But in Rainn's case, a fine form added to the mix.

The best thing? Rainn believed in God.

Good grief, what's going on here, the way I reacted to him. Shouldn't I be long past those feelings? Sorry, Lord. Help me focus on Frivolities.

Now that she'd been held in his strong-as-a-tree-limb arms and against his solid chest, how would she be able to concentrate on merchandise and *Frivolities* customers?

Moselle had her back to Geneva, cell phone to ear, trudging off to her loft above the store.

"Shame on you," Lanae chided. But the twinkle in her sister's eye gave her away.

"You're just sorry you weren't rescued from the tree."

They wrapped their arms around each other. "Too bad I'm not ten years younger," they said in tandem.

And then they shared a hearty laugh.



Not that obnoxious sound!

Rainn slapped the air in the direction of the alarm, simultaneously attempting to surface from his dream. It'd been a good one, too. His arms had been full of warm, soft, fragrant woman. Geneva Carson.

The ringing persisted. Not the alarm.

The phone.

Irritated at the interruption to his dream, Rainn fumbled some more. "'lo?"

"Hello? Is this Rainn Harris?"

He took time for a wide yawn before he managed to answer, "Speaking."

"Rainn, this is Penny Shake. Your sister's landlady in Fort Worth?"

He jerked to a semi-sitting position, more alert, but still half asleep. "Yes? Something wrong? Lindsay?"

"Your sister has been gone for two weeks," Ms. Shake said. "You know I love 'em both. But right now, I need to know what you want me to do with your niece. Sorry about Lindsay, but my own sister's in trouble in Corpus Christi. I need to go to her."

Wide awake now, Rainn swiped his fingernails down his shirt front. "Wait. Lindsay's gone and left Mia with you?" No way should his autistic niece be alone.

Rainn juggled his legs over the mattress, covers tossed aside, to sit on the edge of the bed. "Where did you say my sister is?"

"Have no idea. I've checked with the shelter, the church, her parole officer." She drew an audible breath. "I know you realize Mia can be a handful. Somehow I've managed to deal with school and such—and I really don't mind." Penny Shake's voice shook. "It's just that I have to leave now. My sister had a mild stroke. When she gets out of the hospital, she has to have someone with her."

"I understand." He scratched through his morning jaw stubble. Dead air silence. But his head hummed with guilt first, for neglecting his sister and niece, sympathy next, for Ms. Shake's situation. And finally, a silent prayer for guidance. "How's Mia taking this?"

"In stride. She's a trooper."

"I'm sure sorry to hear about your sister. Your

place is with her. And Mia's place is with me now. Can you think of anyone else who may know Lindsay's whereabouts? You checked with all her friends?"

"For a long time now I've been her only friend. She's like a daughter to me. Problems and all. Legally I didn't know what to do other than call you. I thought about alerting the authorities, but goodness me, I can't imagine that fragile child in the system. Lindsay keeps your number handy on my fridge, so I called you."

He searched for a reason to justify his nine-month absence from Texas. Psychobabble terms like enabling and co-dependency came to mind. Helping Lindsay with her spiritual growth is what he had neglected. "I finally had to get on with my life, you know. I thought Lindsay was going to be OK this time after rehab. Mia's really all right?"

"Mia is taking it in stride. She's been with me a lot lately. I'm sorry to say that Lindsay hasn't been well for a long time. She kept staying out later and later. Recently Mia's been with me most weekends. She's doing OK, though."

He jumped to his feet. "Ms. Shake, in all seriousness, I don't know how to thank you for all that you've done for my family."

"Oh, posh. Call me Penny. Mia is a genius waiting for release and I love her to pieces."

"So, what do you want me to do?"

"You need to come get her. Do you know when that'll be? I really have to get down to Corpus."

"I'll be in Texas as soon as I can. I'll give you a call when I can be more specific."

2

An hour later, Rainn ventured through the front door of *Frivolities*, sweeping aside several garlands of dangling autumn leaves and sunflowers.

When he could see clearly, he spied Moselle on the top step of a ladder, balancing on her tiptoes.

"Mornin', Moselle. Don't you women ever stay off those high places?"

Moselle blew him a kiss, causing her copper and beaded earrings to sway. She cut him a look that resembled her mother.

He reflected on his perception of Geneva. She was a good-looker; but the whole package drew him. Her love of life, so plucky she climbed a tree. He suppressed a grin.

Moselle dropped a pushpin, which skipped down the ladder.

The red-tipped pin bounced off his shoe. "I'll get it."

He set the pin in Moselle's cupped hand. When he brought his elbow back, he caught Geneva's scent. And bumped into her softness. Not since college, had a woman made his heart pound so. And whatever scent she wore, triggered an immediate response in him. It lingered long after they parted.

"Sorry—"

"Oh, it's—"

Their gazes met, and they laughed.

He reacted deep in his gut. And lost what he'd planned to say.

"I'm always barging in to straighten one item or another. But I'm not sorry I bumped into you. Welcome." She completed her action and handed a fringed, hot pink and lime green purse up to Moselle. She patted Moselle's calf before giving Rainn her full attention. "Coffee?"

Geneva had changed her hair. The with-it style swept away from her ears and neck, making her look more radiant somehow.

"You know it." He stepped sideways, mindful to keep his shoulders and feet from knocking into the colorful female madness amidst the crafts and crazy items of the store. He followed her through narrow pathways to the center of the room where Geneva's espresso machine held court behind the counter.

Coffee steamed into the over-sized *Frivolities* mug. Rainn drew in the aroma. His fingers covered hers when he took the offering from her hand.

Geneva must have felt the same skitter of awareness, because her long fingers flew to her collar where she adjusted a button that was fastened secure. Just as quickly, her hand dropped to her *Frivolities* apron pocket.

How could this gutsy, vibrant woman be the mother of his buddy's fiancée? She and Moselle acted more like sisters.

"Rainn, anything else catch your fancy?" Her soft voice brought his mind back to the subject at hand.

She'd really get flustered if he answered, *you*.

"Well, not exactly. You given any more thought to that favor?" He took a cautious sip of the hot coffee,

and then a huge gulp. "I've come to see if I can call it in."

Her laughter tinkled and chimed in with the bell above the front door as it announced another customer. Her expression invited him to continue.

"Yes, I do need your help, Geneva. I have a situation with my sister."

"Well, come to the back. I know what situations with sisters are all about."

He followed in the wake of her fragrant femininity, twisting through a field of ladybugs painted on a multitude of retail objects.

She closed the door to the office and turned to sit on the edge of the light green couch. He sat in the overstuffed chair, careful not to spill his drink.

"That's where Eric always sits."

"Hey, what can I say? It's man-sized." Rainn settled further into the dark red chair, leaning his weight onto the sturdy mahogany arms.

Geneva smoothed a hand over a quilt-in-progress as she placed it in her lap. "What is it, Rainn?"

"My sister Lindsay is in trouble."

She gave him her full attention.

"Lindsay has a lifelong habit of getting in with the wrong crowd. At times, I've prayed with her and felt confident as far as where her place is with the Lord, but she's weak. As we all are in certain areas." He hesitated and drank, keeping a watch on Geneva's reactions.

Her hand went to her throat in that familiar gesture, but she didn't interrupt.

"To come right out with it, Lindsay has a rough history. She's been in rehab for methamphetamine use and had some trouble with the law." He studied her

reaction. "And now she's disappeared."

Geneva's eyes rounded, her eyebrows arching high above the rims of her glasses so that he saw three or four colors in her hazel eyes. Her hand stretched out to him, but he was beyond her reach. She let it drop to her side. "How long?"

Empathy. His respect for her raised another notch.

"Gone two weeks, I guess." He fiddled with the handle on the *Frivolities* mug. "This is the thing. Lindsay is an adult and has to live with the choices she makes. I learned some time ago that we have to follow where the Lord leads. For me, that's not enabling my sister."

Geneva nodded and finally spoke. "But how can I help, Rainn?"

"Lindsay has a daughter, meaning I have a niece. I need to make a run to Fort Worth, Texas, to bring Mia back."

"I see." She sank into the cushion with a sigh, settled in, seemed to study the scar at the corner of his left brow, then met his gaze. "Tell me about Mia."

"Mia is six. Special. Actually, I think she's a really smart kid." He grinned and shook his head as he pictured his niece. He tipped his head back to finish the coffee and set down the mug. "Mia is autistic," he said, as though talking to the table.

"Oh." Geneva spoke the word on a sigh. "She's extra special, then."

Her soft reply settled like the fulfillment he got when he found just the perfect piece of glass for his artwork.

"Has she had the therapy she needs?"

"Occupational, I think they call it." He drew a breath, and scratched the hair at his nape. "As much as