



*Hearts Across Time*

BOOK ONE

COWBOY  
JUST IN  
*Time*

A BACK-IN-TIME  
TIME-TRAVEL ROMANCE

*from author*

LOREE PEERY

# Cowboy Just in Time

LoRee Peery

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

**Cowboy Just in Time**  
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## *Dedication*

We all need other “eyes” on our words in progress. I thank the Lord for the ACFW Scribes group consisting of Emily Grey, Jessica Johnson, Julie Arduini, and Raelee May Carpenter. You ladies made me smile with your comments, challenged me to see what needed attention and rethinking. I appreciate you all. Special thanks to Brenda Herrick for the quip, “Don’t tell God how big your problems are, but tell your problems how big your God is.”

*What People are Saying About  
LoRee's Books*

"A great story! It has me all sighing and stuff and thinking how I'd go back to 1890 to be with my fiancé if that's where he was." ~Raelee May Carpenter

This was a lovely Christmas holiday story!

The author writes in a straightforward yet creative and heartwarming way. The plot is as complex as its characters. The sweetest part of "Christmas Trinkets" was the ending! Kudos to LoRee Peery for creating a captivating story that will warm your heart like hot cocoa on a cold winter day! ~Alexis Goring



# 1

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.  
~Hebrews 13:8*

Amanda spied the barn two country miles from the long driveway. It paled in comparison to the online picture of the acreage. Anticipation built. Viewing the potential site on the screen had awakened her curiosity and invited exploration regarding a remnant of Nebraska's historical past, now available for a slice of modern life.

A life that would build her business and enable her to care for her mother.

Her heart hiccupped as an old crooner sang, "I will wait for you" on the radio. That phrase had been her mother's mantra regarding her father's return.

Amanda switched off the sound. No way would she allow past heartache to raise its ugly head and blight the day.

She rolled to a stop where the drive curved up to the house, and stared. What a place for events. It wasn't hard at all to imagine dance music bouncing out the barn door to welcome excited partygoers.

Country serenity embraced her and invited her to linger. She dug in her bag and tucked the New

Testament in her belt. The barn presented the perfect spot for the quiet time she'd put off that morning.

The car door closed with a quiet snick. Her hand shook as she selected Christi's number on her phone. "I've found the perfect venue for the anniversary party. Our business will take off in style."

Her gaze tracked upward to the peak three stories high, followed the roofline down again. Had cowboys once fed horses from that hayloft? She pulled her ponytail out of her collar and waited for Christi to respond.

"Do you think Mr. and Mrs. Fitzgerald will like it?" Christi popped her gum.

Amanda grinned over her friend's habit, and the wild orange streak in her hair that curved around multiple ear piercings. Cell near her chin, she eyed the old majestic barn. "Oh, my goodness, I know they will. Based on what the client said, she and her siblings are looking for a setting similar to where their parents met at a party in the fall. They got cozy on a hayride and grew more acquainted during the barn dance that followed. We'll have the summer to work out all the details."

"Sounds great," Christi wasn't enthused, judging by her tone.

"It's looking good, Christi." Amanda contemplated the barn, seeing lights strung in her mind's eye..

"Maybe we can plan a few events in between so we're pros by the anniversary party."

Amanda swung open the barn door and stepped into the loft. She circled in ever wider laps, chin lifted, gazing at the rafters. "According to their daughter, the Fitzgeralds have always talked about falling in love

thanks to an autumn celebration. This building is magnificent. Crazy cool. Web info claims it has electricity and everything according to code. Pictures didn't do it justice. Setting up lights for a dance and hook-ups for music shouldn't pose a problem."

"How about you work on scheduling the barn for this fortieth anniversary party, and I'll take on smaller events?" Christi's suggestion proved her a terrific co-worker. "Do you think there's a cowboy to go with that barn?"

"I always claim two minds are better than one. As far as the cowboy is concerned, you're dreaming for me, girl." *Focus on the reason you're here.* "This barn is still painted red, not faded to complete gray like so many. It probably does need a roof, though, because I can see daylight shining through a few scattered holes. We'll pray it doesn't rain."

She returned to the door and gazed at the layout of the house on the hill. "There's plenty of room for people to park. The barn is maybe fifty feet off the driveway, down a knoll from where the house holds court above the other buildings. The hill drops off on the east side of the barn, to a lower level behind. There's a fenced-in area. The corral or whatever it's called."

"Eew. Yuck. Does it smell?"

"No, silly. No animals here. Besides, we're interested in where the dance could be held in the loft, not the rest of the building. I walked through a narrow door right onto a magnificent wide-planked floor. I'm guessing the ceiling must be thirty-five feet high."

"I'm glad to know you're enthusiastic. You need to come up with a name for your event planning business," Christi said.

"It's *our* business, girlfriend. You and I together will make this business work. Now for dividing responsibilities. I'll do the booking and set up catering for the anniversary party. You can handle the music stuff."

"I know how you feel about musicians. You don't suppose people will think Washington County is too far for them to drive from Lincoln or Omaha?"

"As far as loved ones are concerned, such a special event should have people willing to drive a few extra miles. We'll brainstorm business titles together. Anyway, you should see this barn. It's amazing." Amanda back-stepped, and squinted at the peak above the rafters. Her grandfather claimed the beams and heavy support pieces were made of cypress, or some other worthy wood, to withstand time. She lowered her chin to ease the strain on her neck.

Oh, the stories this place could tell. Children who'd run and played on this wood floor, and hid amidst the hay. Where litters of kittens thrived and earned their keep. How many seasons of baled hay had been hoisted into stacks? How many men had sweat from their labors?

She could hardly wait to climb down and explore the lower level, check out the corral and imagine the animals that once lived there. The web site claimed it was designed on the order of a walk-out basement.

"Earth to Amanda. So you think we have time to pull off the details? We don't really have vendors or suppliers lined up yet. Any suggestions where I start for the music?"

"I have a list of deejays on file. I also have access to local musicians because of my former job. Find out what the client wants. Some are satisfied with a guitar

player or vocalist and small band, whatever. If it's live music, you can deal with them." Amanda circled backwards, ever widening her path, still craning her neck upward. "We'll put our heads together and get super organized. You can deal with the music end of our plans. I've got to say, looking at this structure and imagining a long-ago dance makes me think I was born in the wrong century."

Christi laughed. "Snap back to this century and this conversation, please."

"It's so beautiful, I'll do my devotion before I head back."

"Reminder, friend, that's supposed to come first thing."

"Yeah, yeah. I'd salute if my hair wasn't tickling the back of my shoulder blades as I swing around gawking. We have no problems to work out, dear partner. Only opportunities. Or as Grams used to say, 'Don't tell God how big the storm is...'"

A pigeon flapped its gray wings and took flight downward from a crossbeam and up again.

"Yikes!" Amanda yelped.

The pigeon flew out the highest window.

Amanda stepped back into air.

Screaming and flailing, she dropped through the floor. Her cell flew out of her hand and slammed against the side wall.

Falling.

She attempted to catch herself on the edge of the floor to no avail. A spinning funnel cloud sucked her in, yet no tornado-like, train-sounding wind assaulted her ears. Gray streaks, forces of unknown energy, whizzed by. A peaceful eeriness wrapped around her. Expectation carried her on the drawn-out fall. Her

body whipped over as though a giant unfurled her from a carpet.

~\*~

*Don't tell God how big the storm is...*

Gavin finished the statement. "Tell the storm how big your God is." The phrase erupted from his past at the same time he jumped and whirled.

Where had the woman come from? He crouched behind her.

She groaned. "Wha...what did you say?"

He took her by the shoulders and rolled her from side to back. "Lie still for a bit. You mumbled not to tell God how big your problem is. I finished the statement. Take it easy. I've got you."

She shook her head. Color seeped back into her face. Her eyelids snapped open. Eyes the color of spring grass stared at him.

"I heard you speak from the loft and about fell over myself. Nobody's supposed to be up there, and nobody except for critters down here with me. I was ready to climb up and investigate. Didn't have a chance. The next thing I knew, you dropped to the ground."

She closed her eyes again, and grimaced.

"I was too far away to reach the ladder. You fell through the trapdoor and landed here on the lower level of the barn. I had no chance to grab ya."

She winced. No doubt, pain probably shot through her skull.

"Where in the world did you come from?"

She raised an arm and rubbed her eyes. "I thought I was alone here on the acreage. The owners said it was uninhabited."

"Don't know what you mean by acreage. Been a ranch as long as I've been alive. You fell. You're on the ground. That's your trouble right now. But God is bigger. At least that's what my ma used to tell my pa and me. She advised us to tell the storm it didn't have a dream of getting the best of us." *I've got you now, though I'm not sure what to do with you.*

She opened her eyes. Her pupils looked round and unfocused. They drifted closed.

"I feel your confusion. Been kicked by a bronco a time or two. Orient yourself. Don't drift off."

"Your voice is dreamy."

His lip lifted but this was no humorous situation. "I'm awake. Last time I checked I'm a man, not a dream."

"Why can't I focus? I'm not insane, only anxious to get my event business going strong." She attempted a cough to clear her throat. It sounded dry.

He wanted to give her a drink. To be honest, he had no idea what to do with her, or what she was talking about.

"Dirty grit in my mouth." She spat. "Sorry. Bad manners. Never in my life have I laid on the ground with my face in the dust." She sniffed. "I can't place the smell. Hay? Sweet grain? Something else?"

"You smell animals. Cows and horses with a dog or cat in the mix. Hay. Molasses. And yes, moist manure." He bit back a grin over the face she made.

"Really? Gross. There were no animals when I arrived. The barn's supposed to be empty. The livestock long gone, yet this gagging smell makes a lie

of that." She flailed her fingers. "Hurts to breathe. Why am I so disoriented? Nothing makes sense. Especially you."

"Ma'am, I assure you I'm real. Falling like that, makes sense to me for you to be addlebrained." He could say the same for his head. A beauty fell before him. He had nary a notion as to where she'd come from, other than the loft. "My name's Gavin. Can you move?"

"My muscles don't want to obey my mind. Where exactly am I?"

He took her small hand in his. Her fingers twitched. He rested his other hand on her forehead.

Her chest heaved in what still looked like a futile attempt to garner a deep breath. "What happened?"

"Darned if I know. All I ken is you took a fall. The air left your body." *Please, God, don't let her be paralyzed.* "At least, you had a soft landing."

The beauty tried again and finally drew a breath that made her chest heave. She blew it out. Her eyelashes kissed his palm.

He exhaled and finally took a look at her, all the way to her feet. What in tarnation was she wearing, and what in thunder would he tell his boss when the ranch family returned?

## 2

Iron arms rolled her against a sturdy chest. She filled her diaphragm. *Thank You, Jesus.*

Every muscle twitched from neck to ankle. The wonderful pillow of a man's chest cushioned her upper body.

A dude on the acreage? For real? Nothing made any sense.

She couldn't see a thing due to the masculine, sweaty, horsey, yet blessed weight of a warm hand on her forehead. A big hand. A calloused earthy hand.

The instant she convinced herself it was safe to move on her own, he removed his hand and cupped the back of her head. She looked up into intense eyes with starburst lines at the corners, shadowed by the cowboy's gray hat.

*A cowboy?*

No one else was supposed to be here. "Where's my cell phone?"

He dipped his head. She could no longer see his eyes, not that she could discern the color. Her vision now filled with the top of his cowboy hat. A cowboy hat in eastern Nebraska? Unbelievable. She closed her eyes, hoping to focus. *Think, Amanda. Think.*

“Ma’am? Be still, please. Let me see if you have injuries. Can you move your arms and legs?”

*Ma’am?* She had to be dreaming. She forced herself to concentrate, purposely isolate individual muscles and joints. Everything seemed to be in working order. Worked too well, in fact.

No man’s hands had ever roamed over her in such a way, reminding her of a thorough airport security search. She closed her eyes while tremors followed the entrancing touch of his fingers over her neck, shoulders, arms, and legs.

He pulled out her New Testament. “Strange place for a book.” He cleared his throat. “But you shore don’t have room for pockets.”

“I need to get up. I have a party to plan.” She thrashed and squirmed. Strong arms held her down. She experienced no pain anywhere besides her head. Nothing appeared broken. *Amanda Totten, figure this out.* She braved another peek, away from the cowboy’s blue checkered shirt. Shadows and dirt revealed nothing as she stretched her neck forward and attempted to rise. Her body would be a king-sized bruise. “What happened? Who are you? Where’s my pho—” Some instinct told her to stop talking.

“My name is Gavin Medley, ma’am. And I am totally confounded as to what you’re doing here. Where’d you come from? What’s your name?”

Medley? How many times had she pleaded to have nothing to do with men who dealt with music? She prayed his name was the only musical thing about him. More than any man she’d met, this guy begged for a deeper look than what showed on the surface. His name, though, immediately brought her dad to mind. She tied all memories of her father to musicians.

Nothing positive about that remembrance.

"My name's Am..." Wait. Until she figured out what was going on, she wouldn't tell him too much. Play it safe until she got her bearings. "I'm Mandy."

"It is a pleasure to meet you. I work here on the Zero Bar B as ranch foreman."

Not a musician then.

"You've obviously taken a hard fall. I don't believe anything is broken. Can you try to sit up?"

*Wait. Ranch, he said. Here on what ranch?*

Supposedly vacant, what was a ranch foreman doing here? According to the Internet, it *used* to be a working farm.

She checked the man. Cowboy indeed. Toned and muscular. Big and raw-boned. Judging by the length of his legs, tall and fit due to physical labor. He still knelt at her side. Hands on her hips, he shifted to support her weight as they rose.

Huge, curly-haired reddish cows munched on hay on the other side of what appeared to be a lean-to. Their luminous brown eyes reflected her own curiosity as they peered at her from their wide white faces.

"Steady now."

Shivers raced at the way his low-timbred voice played down her spine. She wanted to close her eyes and go to sleep. This had to be some crazy, mixed-up dream. Then again, waking up to a guy built like a Special Forces machine, why not take advantage of all this warm bulk and play a helpless damsel in distress? Although that was far from her usual way of doing things.

"I see a goose egg on your head. And you'll soon hurt in places you never knew you had. We'd better get you back to where you belong."

She eyed the area around them. "I have about as much chance of making it home as winning the lottery."

"Pardon me, ma'am? I don't reckon I understand your talk."

*I'm the one who talks funny?*

Gavin pushed up his hat, exposing twin white scars crossing his lined forehead to disappear underneath a fall of sweat-stained, light brown hair. He scratched his head, then settled the hat and hid the white tan line. "Should anyone else hear you talk this way, they'd declare you plum loco."

*Pull it together. Remember the deep breaths to stave off panic.* As though such self-talk had ever worked when she faced former stressful situations.

She closed her eyes, counted to nineteen. Forget the ten business. Had she fallen into a gigantic practical joke? Judging by the lack of noise other than animals, she had plenty of time to orient herself. She peeked under one lash. A horse. Her gaze noted hooves on hard-packed earth. Up the legs, one white sock beneath a pretty brown chest, then a pink and white nose blowing soft puffs of air. The gnawing clicks of big horse teeth against metal struck her as unique. For the first time in her life, she knew what chomping at the bit meant.

She blew out a breath. Good. It didn't hurt. Too close for comfort, she searched Gavin Medley's face. His gray-blue eyes gave up no answers, but drilled so deep she turned to the side to avoid his scrutiny.

He guided her outside the barn, where Amanda squeezed shut her eyelids against the brightness of the sunlight. She blinked and lifted her gaze to take in the weird surroundings. He led her to a swinging gate at

the end of a board fence.

Peeking around his shoulder she noted they'd walked out of the lean-to and were in a barnyard. Thank goodness for the gate on the low end of the hill. She hadn't been forced to climb up the ladder to exit the barn the way she'd entered. At least she remembered the loft.

She forced her steps to make the incline of the knoll, and leaned into his comforting strength. A dog would have a field day with all the scents attached to the cowboy. She licked her lips. The imagined sense of manure now gone from her mouth, she tasted dry dirt. Shading her eyes, she peered up the driveway, expecting to see the familiar red sedan. No car in sight. She'd obviously taken a mighty strong whap to her head. Amanda stopped in confusion. "Where's my car?"

"Your..." He stopped walking. "What did you say, ma'am?"

"My car. I parked my sedan right there."

"The only thing parked around here is my horse, and he's gettin' mighty restless. What's a...car, you said?"

Something was so wrong with this picture. "I need to sit down. Closest shade, please."

"Shore thing." He tugged her in close against his side. She focused on his chiseled features as he scanned the grassy area between barn and house. "No stray horse in sight."

What did he mean by that? Horse, indeed. He must have moved her car for some reason. She crept along using baby steps, thoughts unclear and going every which way, thankful to stop in the shade next to a rope swing dangling from a huge tree.

Amanda surveyed their surroundings, much as he had. She swayed, unable to process what met her eye. The motion made her mind swerve. She spotted a plain wooden bench on a board stoop attached to a longish low building that wasn't there before. How could that be? "Please." Holding on to the rope gave her no safe purchase. "I'd like to sit on something solid rather than a seat that moves."

Instead of leading her to the building, he scooped her up against his solid chest. In a few long strides he had her sitting with her back against sun-warmed board siding.

She panned the area again, missing the video function on her cell phone. She refused to acknowledge rising panic. The whole thing must be someone's idea of a bad joke. But whose? *Think*. She had to pull this together. Staring off into the distance, her world rocked. Grassy pasture met her view as far as she could see. The same place, yet it wasn't. Shock vibrated through her being, wave after wave. Amanda couldn't define the look Gavin gave her, other than curious bafflement.

"You're trembling." He hugged her to his side. "Let's sit here on the bench for a spell. As soon as you're ready, you can tell me what happened before you hit the dirt. I still don't get why you were in the barn at all."

"I will. First, I'm still so disoriented. Where exactly are we?"

"Twelve miles from Bluff City on the Orville and Frances Boltz ranch." The cowboy emphasized every phrase with precision. "Miss Phoebe is the Boltzs' daughter so it is just them three in the big house. We are sittin' outside the bunkhouse, my home when I'm

not with horses on the range. Two other hands are out fixin' fence right now. We eat meals at the ranch house."

Had her wits been about her, she'd giggle at his exaggerated speech, the way he'd addressed her like a child. "I do remember falling. Is there a hole in the barn floor?"

"No loose boards, nothing amiss the last time I rolled hay from the loft. There are three open holes, trapdoors to ladders that connect the floors." He spoke faster, and wiggled on the seat, adjusted his gray sweat-stained western hat, and leaned forward. "Odd for me to sit here on the bunkhouse porch in the middle of the day. Where'd you come from, anyway?"

She wanted to say Omaha. Had he ever been there? The Omaha she knew didn't fit with where they sat. She had to figure out what was going on. If she'd been tricked onto some unknown movie set, Gavin the cowboy played well his role as a period actor.

Who held the answer to her dilemma? *Lord, whatever is happening here, please fill me and show me what to say.* "Are you part of a western reenactment here? Is that what's going on? Does this barn have noteworthy historical significance? I didn't read that on the web site."

"Ma'am, you took a nasty wallop to the head. You sound foreign, the words you use."

"I apologize. My head hurts. I'm trying to remember." She closed her eyes and rubbed her temples. "That saying from earlier. About God and troubles. You said your mom told you that? Where are your parents? Up at the house?"

"Nope. The Boltz family owns the ranch. They're away at the moment. My story is for later. Right now