

Spring Raine

PARADISE
PINES
#1



Delia
Latham

SPRING RAINE

Delia Latham

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.

Spring Raine

COPYRIGHT 2016 by Delia Latham

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the author or Pelican Ventures, LLC except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

eBook editions are licensed for your personal enjoyment only. eBooks may not be re-sold, copied or given to other people. If you would like to share an eBook edition, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with.

Contact Information: titleadmin@pelicanbookgroup.com

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version^(R), NIV^(R). Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.TM Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

White Rose Publishing, a division of Pelican Ventures, LLC
www.pelicanbookgroup.com PO Box 1738 *Aztec, NM * 87410

White Rose Publishing Circle and Rosebud logo is a trademark of Pelican Ventures, LLC

Publishing History

First White Rose Edition, 2017

Electronic Edition ISBN 978-1-61116-573-9

Published in the United States of America

Dedication

To Susan Lunsford, who so generously and graciously offers her lovely Cambria home when hubby and I get a hankerin' for the seaside. The blue house at the ocean has become almost a "second home" to us...we love it, and we love Susan. She's family, even without the bloodline. Thank you, Susan!

Praise

Love in the WINGS

The power of love and the power of prayer, coupled with God's power, are perfectly blended in a story and romance that left me cheering, and eagerly awaiting Delia's next release! ~ Marianne Evans

This book pulls you into a spiritual battle for the souls of Angel Falls and Heart's Haven. I cried, shivered, and smiled through this story. ~ Clare Revell

Lexi's Heart

This is a sweet and gentle story about the re-knitting of life's raveled ends. Lexi is afraid to love again, afraid of losing the mother who's been her lifelong best friend, but that's where the re-knitting comes in. Delightful! ~ Liz Flaherty

Jewels of the Kingdom is an enchanting short story about a community where angels dwell and love blooms. Delia Latham has a gift for creating engaging, magnetic characters and a charming setting where heavenly encounters unfold. Endearing relationships and a journey to forgiveness are strong elements in this God-inspired short story written with refreshing creativity. ~ Nancee Marchinowski

Paradise Pines Series

Spring Raine
Summer Dreams
Autumn Falls
Winter Wonders

1

For a moment she couldn't breathe, and then the barest whisper passed her lips—half spontaneous praise, half simple awe. "Oh my...I've found Paradise!" From within her sporty little red convertible, Raine Presley peered through a misty early March drizzle at the most beautiful piece of land she'd ever seen. Paradise Pines Lodge. Her home for the next few months.

Aside from the forest of tall Cambria pines, which she had expected to see, the grounds boasted a huge number of beautiful old sycamore trees—tall, stately, and dripping with silvery Spanish moss. Moonlight glowed through the lacy fingers of hanging flora, creating a somewhat haunting air, and a tiny shiver made its way up her spine. But not enough to make her turn and leave. The beauty far outshone the slight spookiness of moss in moonlight.

Square in the center of the surrounding forest of variegated tree species, many of which Raine found unfamiliar, the lodge itself demanded far more than a passing glance. The website had described Paradise Pines Lodge as "spacious." Raine chuckled as she pulled her car under the east carport, as she'd been directed. Spacious was a blatant understatement. The place was huge, and yet warmth and welcome radiated from within. Lights shone from every facing window—and they were many. Two chimneys, one on each end

of the lodge, sent thin plumes of smoke spiraling into the sky.

Miss Angelina Love, with whom Raine had communicated via email, had provided a bit of history on the duplex, which had once been a popular fishing lodge. The former owner, known only as Preacher, renovated the interior shortly before his death, turning each floor into a single large apartment. The upper dwelling was available for rent on a seasonal basis. No one got to stay at Paradise Pines for a week or two...it was all season or not at all.

The online photographs did little justice to this place. Now that Raine sat, stunned and overwhelmed, staring at the old lodge, she understood why the waiting list was long, even though the site made it clear Paradise Pines would host only one guest per season—or perhaps a small family. Only the upper apartment was offered for rent, and the unit had only two bedrooms. She assumed the lower level was occupied by the owner, or possibly management. An applicant's chances of being chosen were slim, even within a few years of applying.

"Thank You, Lord!" She breathed a prayer into the silence inside her vehicle. How she'd managed to find favor with whoever granted access to this place, given her last-minute application for spring tenancy, she had no idea...but now, with her stunned gaze taking in the glorious surroundings, she had to believe God had a hand in it.

She climbed out and headed for the large entryway, pulling her suitcase and trying to take in everything as she went. So much incredible beauty. Even the months she planned to stay seemed inadequate. How would she ever make herself leave?

Pausing at the end of the walkway, she studied the log building. Lights in a dozen windows lent the place an almost magical feel, as if she stood on the brink of a fairyland. But wasn't there something else? Some *aura* that placed a pale but luminous glow around the entire lodge?

As she stood, suitcase handle in one hand and handbag hanging off the other shoulder, a large insect flitted close and hovered a few feet in front of her. Startled for a moment, she laughed when she realized it was a gorgeous monarch butterfly.

"Well, hello there." She spoke softly, her eyes on the delicate creature. While she was by no means an expert in the ways of butterflies, it seemed odd to see one flying about in the wet weather. "Why aren't you hiding away somewhere nice and dry?"

The monarch flew closer, brushed against her cheek, and then backed away to hover a foot or two in front of her yet again.

Raine laughed. "So you came out just to welcome me? Well, thank you kindly, little one. I appreciate that." She shook her head. Good thing no one was around to witness her talking to an insect.

Her parents, in particular. They'd think she'd lost her mind.

The creature circled her body in a graceful, fluttering dance of delicate wings, and then flew off toward the woods.

In the next instant, the front door opened and Raine caught her first glimpse of Miss Angelina Love.

Snowy white hair formed a glowing nimbus around the woman's head. With the lights behind her tall, willowy figure and the moonlight between Raine and the door, the result was a perfect halo. Miss Love's

maxi-length sheath—the same pure white as her hair—only added to the startling illusion.

Raine gasped when an amorphous shadow beyond the doorway moved in a soft wave, creating a massive pair of shadowy wings. She released a breath when the shadow disappeared.

“Raine! Is that you? Come in out of that drizzle!” Even Miss Love’s voice had a melodious trill that, given the impression already created by light and shadow, put Raine in mind of angelic song.

She shook her head at her own fanciful imagination. In her defense, however, she’d been driving several hours and spent most of the previous night packing after a long, grueling argument with her parents about this trip. No wonder she was seeing things and imagining even more.

“Yes, ma’am. I’m Raine Presley.” She arrived at the door and found herself mesmerized by a pair of eyes the bright, clear blue of a summer sky and a smile that surely epitomized the word *welcome*. Tiny lines around Miss Love’s eyes and mouth spoke to the fact that she smiled often. She wasn’t exactly beautiful, and yet...something about her *was*. Raine couldn’t stop staring and felt a blush warming her cheeks at her own impolite reaction.

The moment she stepped into the large, open entry area and released her grip on the handle of her suitcase, Miss Love folded her into a gentle hug.

“Welcome, child.” Her voice flowed over Raine’s exhausted body and mind like warm, soothing honey, refreshing her in some inexplicable way. “Welcome to Paradise Pines. Make yourself at home, because that’s where you are.”

For one awful moment, Raine was sure Miss

Love's kindness would open a floodgate, releasing a veritable deluge of tears.

This trip to Cambria had come at a high emotional cost for her. For the first time in the entirety of her existence, she'd stood up to her parents for something she wanted. What was so wrong with taking some time to just *be*...to simply enjoy life before launching herself into the career she'd worked hard and long to achieve?

A position within the state forensics department was no small accomplishment, even as an apprentice. Raine was well aware that she was the envy of many of her classmates at the university. But the job would be taxing and life consuming. She'd be sacrificing her secret dream of having a home and family—even a real life outside her job. So she'd demanded this getaway to Cambria, in the face of her parents' blatant disapproval.

That disapproval had weighed on her during the entire four-hour drive from Pasadena. Her father's thunderous expression, along with her mother's disappointed one as she drove away, left her feeling like a bad daughter and a horrible human being. They'd always been wonderful, supportive parents...didn't she owe it to them to be a perfect daughter?

But she so desperately needed this time away, to be on her own for a time. No one telling her what to do or what decisions she should make.

Miss Love's warm, open-armed welcome and a smile that said Raine wasn't a terrible person comforted her to a ridiculous degree.

After all, the woman needed to welcome her tenants. Her pleasant demeanor was most likely good customer relations. That's all Raine could possibly be

to her—a young woman who had rented the upstairs apartment for a time. If she didn't leave happy, the owner of this beautiful paradise in the Cambrian pines risked a bad review online. No, she shouldn't take Miss Love's sweet welcome too personally.

But she could enjoy it for the moment.

After promising to join the older woman for a get-acquainted lunch at noon the next day, Raine accepted the key from Miss Love and headed upstairs for a look at her new "home."

She fell in love, just as she'd known she would. Someone certainly knew how to paint "welcome" into the walls and furnishings. Raine felt immediately at home, as if she could stay forever.

But of course, she couldn't. She had a job and two unhappy parents to get back to as soon as her springtime respite was past. Within an hour, she'd put away everything she'd brought and settled in to relax...alone...in "her own" place. What a grand feeling!

She rose early the next morning. Being overexcited wasn't conducive to sleeping in late, which she'd planned to do. Instead, come 7 AM, she'd already donned fitness clothing and running shoes. After circling the lodge twice, trying to take everything in, she spotted a narrow foot trail in the wooded area at the rear of the property and set off at a jog.

Birds called early-morning greetings as sunshine peeked through the branches hanging over the path. Butterflies flitted and bees buzzed around bushes and plants, the likes of which Raine had never seen, all in

lush spring bloom. Their blossoms created bright splashes of color in the dim woods. A gentle breeze lifted her ponytail, and Raine pulled in a lungful of sweetly scented air.

Could Heaven be any better than this?

As she moved through the shadowy woods, in and out of bright spots of sunshine, something she could only call joy stirred from a deep slumber somewhere within her soul. Laughter bubbled from her lips, and she made no attempt to rein it in. By the time she burst into a clearing at the end of the path, Raine thought she'd explode if she didn't release some of the exuberance and just plain happiness that filled her soul.

She bounced into the clearing, whirling around in a joyous dance of praise, her feet moving in time to the song in her soul.

Throwing her head back, she laughed until her sides hurt, and then lifted her head to the glorious blue sky overhead. "Thank You, Lord!" she called into the stillness, absolutely certain God was right there, laughing with her. "Thank You!"

"What in the blue blazes are you doing on my property?"

A deep male voice, clearly not sharing Raine's "moment," crashed her happy time, sending shivers of shock and fright throughout her entire system—mind and body. She stopped whirling so quickly she stumbled, but managed to catch herself before falling flat on her face. Her heart, so full of abandon and joy the moment before, threatened to beat its way free of her chest.

Swinging toward the icy voice, Raine stared into steel-gray eyes beneath dark blond eyebrows pulled

low in an angry frown. A matching beard and mustache, carefully maintained to look like a couple days of scruff, shadowed a face that might have been dangerously handsome—if its owner weren't trying to kill her with a piercing, narrow gaze.

"I—I—" She swallowed hard and almost pushed out another attempt, but the stranger interrupted.

"Never mind. You're on private property. And thanks to your noisy arrival, I've just destroyed my wood sculpture." He held up a small piece of wood, clearly bearing signs of new marks from a carving tool...and a jagged break where it had broken off of something bigger and stronger.

"No!" Raine's horrified gaze drifted behind the man to what was clearly a workstation in a state of orderly chaos. Logs of different types and sizes lay in separate piles. Sawdust and bits of wood and chips littered the ground around a large carved piece...a bear, its maw open in a shockingly lifelike display of aggression.

An unsightly gouge in the wood left a glaring flaw on one side of the animal's head. The irate man staring her down held the missing chunk of pine—or oak, or teak, or whatever this fellow used to create his masterpieces—in his hand.

"I'm so sorry!" Heat rushed into Raine's face, even as her stomach turned a double somersault.

No wonder he was angry.

"So am I—sorry you showed up." He tossed the ear onto the ground. "Just go, would you?" He whirled and strode off toward the bear. After three long strides, he turned to walk backwards. "You're still here?"

Anger battled with embarrassment, and Raine swung back the way she'd come. She deeply regretted

having caused damage to the truly stunning carving, but she certainly hadn't set out to do so. How could she have known people worked in the woods in Cambria?

She stopped just before setting off down the path she'd followed to the clearing, and swung around to face the grumpy stranger. "You're a very rude man."

He took a step toward her, his lips drawn into a tight line. "I'm rude? Lady, I'm not the one who barged onto someone else's property without permission." His chilly gaze narrowed to a glittering slit, and Raine's eyes widened when his hands tightened into fists that looked hard enough to do some real damage.

"Well—"

He pointed one long finger. "Not another word. Just. Go!"

Raine fled into the trees. Fast.

2

By the time she arrived back at the lodge, fury had replaced the fear that paralyzed her in the stranger's presence. How could anyone be so horribly unpleasant? She hadn't seen a single *Private Property* sign on her trek through the woods. What right did that awful man have to read her the riot act?

She showered, and then whiled away the morning on the balcony with a good book, making a deliberate effort to cool her temper before joining Miss Love for lunch. The shower helped her feel fresher, but she was unable to shake the rage that tried to choke her. Finally calling it a lost cause, she drew a deep breath and headed downstairs. She'd just have to hide her mood from her landlady.

It didn't work.

The woman answered Raine's knock, took one look at her face, and her blue eyes widened. She laid a slender hand on Raine's arm and drew her inside. "Oh my, sweetie—come in. Why are you so angry?"

Raine frowned. "How do you know I'm angry?"

"Because you're glowing red, dear. Now what's going on? No, wait...come have a nice glass of raspberry tea and talk to me while I finish getting things ready."

After seating Raine at a small table covered with a white lace tablecloth, her hostess set out delicate china

and silverware, along with dainty sandwiches and bowls of hot soup.

Raine couldn't quite wrap her mind around Miss Love's statement at the door. "What did you mean...I'm glowing red?"

The older woman paused in her happy bustle around the kitchen. She said nothing for a moment, but filled a small bowl with green olives and joined Raine at the table.

"Sometimes I see things, dear—things other people don't seem to, for whatever reason. When I opened my door, you were surrounded by an ugly, dirty red aura. Your entire body was painted crimson." She shrugged and offered a tiny smile. "Red usually indicates anger, and the deeper the red, the more intense the emotion. You're *very* angry." She reached for Raine's hand and grasped it in a firm grip. "Let's pray, and you can tell me about it while we eat."

Raine bit at her lip, but she bowed her head.

"Dear, sweet Father God. Thank You, as always, for the beautiful gift of sustenance that You've provided. We are grateful. Thank You also for sending Raine to this lovely spot in Your world for a while. I will love having her nearby. And one more thing, Father...whatever is bothering my young friend today, please give her Your peace, and calm her troubled spirit. I thank You now for what I know You will do." She squeezed Raine's hand. "Amen."

To Raine's surprise, she did feel calmer. She'd tried all morning to release the anger that had her by the throat, with zero success.

Her hostess's sweet spirit and simple prayer had accomplished what seemed impossible in a matter of minutes. What was it about this woman?

Miss Love swallowed a dainty bite of her olive-and-parsley sandwich on focaccia bread. "So. Will you tell me what's going on?"

"I met your neighbor this morning." Raine sipped tea, trying to keep the memory from raising her ire yet again. "He is not a nice man."

Blue eyes widened in obvious surprise. "You can't be talking about Declan Keller. Why, he's quite the nicest young man I've ever met...well, one of the nicest." A twinkle from her cerulean gaze tickled Raine's lips into a smile. "I've been around a long, long time, dear. I guess I may have met someone nicer than Declan, but I really don't remember when."

Raine laughed. "You can't have been around that long, Miss Love. Besides, yours is a timeless beauty. I can't imagine you ever looking old."

"Call me Miss Angie, dear. Please." Her smile nearly took Raine's breath away. "And you're so sweet. But I'm older than you think."

Good manners kept Raine from asking *how* old, but she couldn't help wondering. The lady seemed ageless.

"Well, be that as it may, I think I may have seen a side of Mr.—what did you say? Keller?" At Miss Angie's nod, she continued. "I saw a side of Mr. Keller that you've most likely never seen."

"Hmm." A puzzled frown placed a delicate line across her brow. "Want to tell me about it?"

Raine hesitated, but then launched into a detailed account of her encounter with the handsome but unfriendly owner of the neighboring property. "He was totally obnoxious." She finished her story and reached for another green olive.

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh

word stirs up anger." Miss Angie's murmured words barely reached Raine's ears.

"I'm sorry. I missed that...?"

The woman smiled and waved a deprecating hand. "Oh, just quoting from one of my favorite books."

"And what book might that be?"

"Why, the Holy Bible, of course." Miss Angie smiled, and in the same instant, a beam of sunshine pierced through the window behind her.

For the second time since she'd arrived, Raine saw a halo of light around the woman's white hair. She caught her breath, and then released it as her hostess continued.

"That verse was from Proverbs fifteen, verse one. 'A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.' I was just thinking that my friend Declan might have handled the situation a little better if he'd remembered that verse in time. But then again, he's only human." She shook her head, and her pleasant face took on a puzzled expression. "The entire race seems a bit forgetful of God's Word at times."

"Yes, I suppose we are."

"Now." Miss Angie reached across the small table to place a gentle hand atop Raine's. "Don't be too quick to decide what you think of Declan. I wouldn't base an opinion on that unfortunate meeting. It is your glory to pass over a transgression."

What was that supposed to mean? "I'm afraid I don't understand."

Soft, warm laughter acted on Raine's emotions like a dose of high-strength calm.

"Oh, there I go again. That was also from Proverbs—chapter nineteen, verse eleven. 'The