

Loy's Inn
#3

WITHOUT A
Dream

LOREE
PEERY

Without a Dream

LoRee Peery

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Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

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Publishing History
First White Rose Edition, 2024
Electronic Edition ISBN 978-1-5223-0456-2
Published in the United States of America

Dedication

To anyone who has ever had a dream. God puts His desires within our hearts. Our job is to listen and follow through. Sometimes we need to take detours and zigzag our way along the journey, but if what we want aligns with God's will, those dreams will come to fruition.

And to any mother who has given up her infant. Bless you for loving that child so much.

Ivy's Inn Books

Without a Song
Without a Home
Without a Dream

1

HAVE I NOT COMMANDED YOU? BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS. DO NOT BE AFRAID; DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED, FOR THE *LORD* YOUR GOD WILL BE WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU GO.

~ JOSHUA 1:9

FRIDAY EVENING, 5:30

Autumn in the Nebraska country must be beautiful to some appreciative people she knew, but the blur of green grass turning tannish-brown along with already naked branches or half-dressed trees held no appeal for Josey. She listened for the directional voice on her phone's navigation telling her where to turn.

Finally at her destination, she opened her car door and inhaled the fresh air. The dry scent of fallen leaves accented a hint of something else in the atmosphere. Humidity? On second sniff, the air felt almost as damp as before a spring rain. "Fanciful woman. It's October."

Slightly intimidated by the size of Ivy's Inn, she savored the sight of the big old farmhouse, now a B&B, where she planned to stay for who knew how long. Free lodging to those in need or at a crossroads, Aunt

Mae had claimed. But she died before either of them had an opportunity to check it out. Right now, Josey didn't have a job or a clear picture of the future. She ran her gaze over the expanse of ranchland within sight. The white fence setting off the B&B sparkled like new, which accented the stately, one hundred-year-old structure of the Inn. The large two-story ranch house had new windows in the original attic. According to the website, the renovation now included a suite on that third level, and an addition on the back of the first floor. The impressive building would be the largest dwelling she'd ever spent the night in.

Quiet surrounded her with a presence all its own. Josey's chest trembled as she surveyed the impressive wrap-around porch. The country atmosphere had amplified her trepidation, which formed the second she'd made the final turn onto the gravel road. Was she shaken from anxiety or with anticipation? She'd grown up a town girl, and had lived in too many small places to count.

Far off thunder rumbled a warning, disturbing the serenity. A sudden cold wind blew across the land. The sun disappeared. Crackling leaves cascaded from several trees, others dotted the landscape orange and red in the darkening distance. Josey rubbed her arms where the hairs stood to attention, and shut herself back inside the car.

She remained seated for a moment, listened to the wind howl through nearby treetops, and mentally retraced her recent route as directed by her phone. Turning from the blacktop onto a maintained gravel

county road, where dust had roiled behind the car, she was struck with the isolation of this place in ranch country. Had she made a giant mistake by coming here?

Why won't the guilt stay away?

Oh, to have a dollar for the ninety-nine times she'd asked herself that question on the drive from Lincoln.

Even though what happened wasn't my fault. Life must be about my future now.

A tire swing danced and circled in the air as though a ghost took a joy ride. The high limb belonged to a gigantic tree where upper branches arced in a backbend. She traced the horizon, paid attention to the tree line marking the creek, which broke the landscape of grasses. The Nebraska countryside seemed to have taken on a life of its own. The demarcation between blue sky and the horizon narrowed with an approaching bank of gray clouds closing the gap to earth.

Josey faced the large inn with its welcoming fall colors quilted as pillow covers that accented the porch furniture. Two rocking chairs with turquoise-colored cushions also swayed with a sudden wind gust. A rustic swing composed of pine logs jangled on its chains, jarring the russet and gold pillows nestled in readiness for the next occupant's pleasure.

Atmospheric rumbles drew closer. The sky darkened. She'd best get a move on, or she'd soon be soaked. The rumbling noise grew closer and morphed into the rhythm of an approaching diesel truck engine. Josey trembled. Only one other boarder was supposed

to be here. The older woman wouldn't be driving such a heavy-handed machine.

Enough dallying. Anyone could be approaching. Josey fumbled for her phone to retrieve the security code for the door. Her lifeline to the outside world almost fell to the solid ground.

Three things happened at once.

The truck driver cut the engine and stepped down from the cab.

An older, seventyish woman, exited the front door, and stepped onto the porch. She raced to the log swing at an angle in the corner, and gathered the pillows. Then with one hand, she attempted to untie the rocker cushions.

A bounding brown and white bundle of fur rushed from the far side of the house. The monstrous St. Bernard must be Hugo. She'd also seen pictures on the website of the miniature horse-sized pet. But why was the dog here if the owners weren't?

Ignoring her natural shyness around men, Josey turned back to the driver. He had an interesting face. Open and friendly, yet concern pulled his thick brows almost together at the bridge of a thinnish long nose. The medium brown hair, styled above his forehead, lifted in the wind.

The dog pressed between the truck door and the man's leg.

He bent to pet Hugo and shut his truck door. "I was supposed to pick up this big guy yesterday." He drew closer and opened her driver's door. "Hey, looks like you just got here."

The older woman joined them, her long skirt whipping around her calves. "You must be Josey, and Dr. Thunder Wade. I'm Aurora Barnhart. I didn't know the dog was even here."

What's a doctor doing at the Inn? Josey opened her mouth to say hello.

Aurora raised a hand to stop her and then scrubbed hair from her eyes. "Later. That wind is something else. We're in for a whale of a storm. I prayed already it doesn't hail. Just leave your car here on the gravel for now. I'll help get your bags before the sky weeps."

As though the heavens heard the woman, splats of icy moisture in a size Josey had never experienced before slapped against her body.

"And God says amen." The good-looking doctor maneuvered the dog to one side, shut his truck, and then opened her back car door in smoothly coordinated moves. "Let's hurry. The sky's about to open up."

In tandem, they stared heavenward. A looming charcoal cloud with defined edges moved in closer to the horizon as it obliterated paler sky barely revealed above the horizon.

Aurora nodded at them both. "I set out the weather radio and some necessities if we lose power."

"Those clouds are something else." Josey popped her head inside her driver's door and released the trunk latch.

"Wall cloud." Aurora's voice held such awe she could have been looking at the deity. "We are

witnessing the power of God.”

“Thanks.” Josey glanced at the smiling vet. “There’s a larger bag in the trunk.”

He hastened to retrieve the rolling suitcase. Josey shouldered her purse and handed Aurora an oversized tote.

Twin lightning bolts zig-zagged to form a Y in the northwest.

Josey jumped and gathered the rest of her belongings.

Booms of thunder louder than Fourth-of-July ripped through the heavens.

Hugo barked once and ran for shelter on the porch, where he scurried behind the rocker closest to the door, which slid the furniture forward. Wind rocked the chairs.

The threesome hustled up the steps behind the dog.

Aurora had called the man a doctor. He set down her bag on wheels as though it weighed nothing, and opened the door while fighting the wind.

Standing close on the porch, Josey looked him in the eye for the first time, and almost stumbled over the threshold. Bronze eyes beneath heavy brows seemed to touch her to the bone. A nudge at the small of her back moved her forward.

“Sorry.” Aurora passed in front of the doctor sideways. “This is a good-sized tote, all right. I would have arrived around noon, but a blinding downpour made me pull off the road at Plainview. Once it was done pouring, it didn’t take me long to get here. I’m just

getting acquainted with the rooms on the main floor.”

Josey stepped to the right of the entry. “Where’d you drive in from?”

“Ladies.” The doctor pushed the luggage through the door. “Let’s get everything inside and then talk. Come on, Hugo. Good boy.”

The giant ball of fur needed no further coaxing. He pounded past them and went to the left.

“I’m from Sioux City.” Aurora placed the tote on the bench of a nine-foot antique hall tree.

Josey followed suit, hanging her purse on an attractive curved hook. Then she opened her phone for text instructions from management. She located her note card with a key on the old desk at the opposite side of the stairs.

“This storm carries weight.” Aurora headed to the kitchen. “I’ll get us something to drink. Then again, guess you can pick out your own whatchamacallit of choice.”

“Whatchamacallit?”

“Oh, you know. Those little containers of flavored hot drinks next to the coffee machine.”

“I believe they’re called pods. But I like whatchamacallit.” Josey’s attempt at humor didn’t faze Aurora.

She turned up the volume on the radio. “This will be a doozy of a storm.”

A deep, disembodied voice announced, “Straight-line winds of sixty to eighty miles per hour will hit somewhere. We expect lightning strikes and major tree damage. Power outages in the area are imminent.”

Josey gasped.

"I don't much like storms, but you'll be all right." The tightness around Dr. Handsome's eyes and mouth belied his words. One side of his mouth curved in a half smile. "By the way, I'm Thunder Wade, county veterinarian at your service."

"Josey Dale. I'm confused. If the owners are gone, why is Hugo here by himself? Is he sick?"

"That's why I drove out here, for Hugo. I also kennel dogs when I have openings. But late yesterday I had an emergency surgery near the state line and couldn't come for him until now."

"I've never had a dog. But don't a lot of owners take their pets with them on vacation?"

"As you can see, Hugo is a handful. The Bennetts have gone off to The Gulf so Ivy could see the ocean."

"Who is Ivy again?"

"Roni and Dawson's precocious daughter." Aurora answered from the dining room area where she pointed to a framed child's drawing. "Ivy has made her favorite word, *lovely*, well known around here."

"You've been at the inn before, I take it?" Thunder shivered as though rain had dripped down his collar.

"My first time. Ivy's quotes are posted on the website since the inn is named after her."

Josey didn't care about the details she'd overlooked. Once the sky settled down, she hoped to get her current surroundings all sorted out.

Aunt Mae had told her Ivy's B&B was the perfect place to rest a soul in private and where spirits moved back to God through nature. For sure, Josey was here

to rest her soul and pursue a future. The sister of her birth mother, Aunt Mae was a force to be reckoned with and had given Josey and her daughter, Farrah, a home.

I suppose Ivy's Inn is as good a place as any to decide what I'll do next in life. Will I develop a future goal? How did one go about pursuing a purposeful agenda?

Thunder squeezed behind her. "I need to find the dog."

Josey wandered to the impressive, large picture window decorated with etched glass. She gazed out at the indistinct charcoal gray of the stormy landscape.

Convinced the voice of Jesus spoke to her during her twilight sleep that morning, the still small Voice rolled through her mind. *Take My hand, my daughter, my child – and I will lead you, I will guide you. Your eyes are full of tears, your head is bowed down, you can't see where you are going, my love. But I can see ahead, so follow Me. I know where you are going. I will be with you. I will show you the way to be safe in My loving arms.*

Josey's arms had remained empty since her baby girl's birth.

As I planned, so will you be secure in the palm of My hand, little one.

Due to her age at the time of Farrah's birth, Josey had had no choice but to stay out of the baby girl's life. Now that Farrah was married, and with Aunt Mae in heaven, had Josey chosen wisely by coming to Ivy's Inn?

2

FRIDAY EVENING, 6:15

Thunder turned from the window where lightning flashed from the backdoor as the furious storm gathered strength. “Man alive, it’s wild out there. Thanks for the coffee and sandwich, Aurora. Hugo, you’re being a good boy.”

Josey sauntered from the bottom of the stairs to stand at the island room divider, pale and looking as though she was a thousand miles away. “Did you say something?”

“Just talking to Aurora and Hugo.” Instinct drew him to her, as though she called out from within. What was her story? “I communicate with animals a lot.”

Aurora added lemon muffins to the small plates she’d set out. “I’m a romantic. History has already proven that Ivy’s Inn is where souls heal and romance blooms. First with the managers Roni Marsden and Dawson Bennett, followed by Fawn Stuart and Jarett Raymond.”

Now was not the time to admit he was also a romantic.

Josey rubbed her folded arms as if chilled. “What do you mean?”

“Oh, those coming together stories belong to the

couples who met here. Every bit as good as a romantic novel. Romance tales to sigh over along with hot chocolate and a roaring fire.”

“What you’ve set before us is just fine.” He addressed Aurora. “Is there a plain coffee? I’ve met all the Bennetts, including the ones from Norfolk, and the Raymonds at church. Great people. Ivy is the smartest girl I’ve ever met. And now she’s a proud big sister to a little brother.” Thunder laughed and picked up a plate. “She told me everything about the baby while I was checking out Hugo.”

Aurora handed him a refilled steaming cup. “I’m all for meeting terrific people, and figured you for a black coffee man. I’d have been quite content shaking hands with you two under calmer weather.”

The skies took that moment to accent her words with driving rain so intense it obliterated any clear view through the windows.

Thunder savored the drink in his hand, and prayed hail wouldn’t dent his unpaid-for truck.

“Amen to that.” Josey shot Thunder a lingering look.

Could his distaste for this weather show?

She turned back to Aurora. “How did you find out about this delightful place?”

“The same way you did. I recognized your name right off. Your Aunt Mae told me there’s a lovely, secluded B&B on a ranch near Verdigre, Nebraska. She shared how the owners, Wayne and Allison Bennett, who live in Norfolk, offered sanctuary. Wayne’s brother, Dawson, and his wife, Roni, usually manage

the Inn. When I heard they planned a vacation, I offered to step in so you weren't alone during your visit."

Josey shook her head. "It's hard to believe you know my aunt. And Norfolk is quite a way from here."

"Oh, Allison, Wayne, and their twins often come here on weekends. Fawn and Jarett help during the week if needed. How about you, girl?"

Josey's smile distracted Thunder from his ingrained reaction to the melee outdoors. They naturally must assume he was the one to take charge of their waiting out the storm. Some hero he was, with his disdain for thunderstorms.

"You sound like Aunt Mae, who's called me *girl* all my life. I'm here for a combination of reasons."

Why did such a pretty woman need God's healing?

"Eat up that muffin, girl. There's plenty more delights from the bakery in town, including the famous Kolaches, here in the walk-in freezer."

Thunder swallowed the last bite of his muffin, a remnant of lemon remained on his tongue. "I know for a fact there are gallons of vanilla ice cream in that freezer."

"Oooee, if the weather switches to warm, I could fix us an affogato."

"An affo—what?"

"Affogato." Aurora laughed and slapped his shoulder. "Espresso and ice cream along with any flavoring your heart may desire. I'll check out choices of coffee flavors, plus syrups..."

Josey sipped her chai tea and raised a brow at him. "I take it you're a local boy?"

"Folks moved right after I was born, so this is the only home I've known except for going away for college. Are the two of you familiar with our little town of Verdigre?" Thunder pulled out a stool for Aurora to join them.

The women shared a glance and shook their heads.

"The veterinary clinic is easy to spot. Been in the same place since my dad was a kid. You turn on Main. It's two blocks up from the bakery that started out across the street."

Aurora appeared calm with the explosive booms that occasionally shook the house. She was the perfect example of a grandmother, same as Dr. Pierson's wife Ruby. He pictured the dear old Doc with his wild white hair that matched his coat, where he often stood at the clinic's front desk next to his bride of sixty years. "Before retirement, the previous vet only cared for small animals brought into the clinic. He admitted once that he missed trips to pull reluctant country calves into the world, but didn't miss the farmers' emergency calls at any hour of the day or night."

Hugo rushed in from the mud room more like a whirling dervish than a dog, and forced himself under the dining room table. A wooden chair fell over and two knocked into one another.

Aurora's fork clattered to the counter. "What in the world?"

"It's a normal reaction." Thunder reassured the

women. "Dogs feel the vibrations of thunder before we hear the heavens roar. They also sense atmospheric changes."

At that moment, an unidentifiable, furious noise roared from north of the house.

All three startled.

Hugo whined and dropped to the floor.

A thudding crash sounded outside and reverberated through the air.

Thunder jerked as if he'd been shot.

Josey flinched.

Aurora groaned.

The lights blinked off.

Though the outside vapor light was dim as the sky grew darker, Thunder grabbed the rain slicker from where he'd tossed it over the deep sink in the mud room. Hand on the doorknob, he glanced back at the women, who stood rooted in place like wide-eyed mimes. "I have to see what's going on." He banged out the door. Opened it again. "Come on, boy. A moment's reprieve is a good time for you to go out."

Thunder tied the hood of the rain jacket as he stepped to the side of his truck bed. From behind the cab, he grabbed a heavy-duty flashlight out of the toolbox.

He hurried down the drive and saw sparks. Not a good sign. "Hugo, come."

The dog pushed against his side, and Thunder hooked two fingers through the collar.

Around the curve, his gaze confirmed his fears. A gigantic cottonwood tree with four trunks bigger than

full grown trees lay across the drive. What made it worse, one wide trunk had fallen and broken electric wires that now whipped and hissed against the wet earth.

Hugo whimpered and pushed against Thunder's thigh.

"I know. Not good. Not good at all." He circled the mess from a distance. Time stood still while the straight-line wind lashed through the trees.

Hugo barked and swiveled after his tail.

A furious thunder clap preceded a double zigzag trail of lightning that raised the hair on the back of Thunder's neck. He lowered his arm from reaching for Hugo's collar. The dog raced ahead. He also broke into a run.

The women gasped in unison as Thunder stormed back inside.

Hugo squeezed against Thunder's side and made a bow of his body as they slid through the side entrance together.

He shut the door. Rather than letting loose in the laundry room, Hugo shook his voluminous body in the hallway. Thunder chuckled as Josey and Aurora backed up. He couldn't blame them. Water splayed on both walls for six feet in front and back of the dog.

The trio laughed in chorus, which broke the high tension.

Thunder still chuckled as he shimmied out of the wet slicker and reached for a hanger. His jeans were soaked.

"Storms are common. Roni wrote there is spare