

The background of the cover is a photograph of a rural farm scene at dusk. A wooden windmill stands on the left, and a large barn with a dark roof is on the right. The sky is a mix of dark blue and light grey, suggesting twilight. The overall mood is peaceful and nostalgic.

LOREE PEERY

Sage
AND
SWEETGRASS

FRIVOLITIES
BOOK 3

Sage and
Sweetgrass

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.

Sage and Sweetgrass

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Dedication

Dedicated to my sister, Renée Mosel, whose bravery
humbles me.

To my brother, Gaylen Mosel, an artist and horse
whisperer, sage in his own unique way.

And to every reader: I hope you know the Lord has
His hand on your life.

Also Available

Frivolities Series

Moselle's Insurance
Rainn on My Parade

1

I am alive...

Somewhere out there, is someone waiting to share my life?

“Somewhere out there,” Lanae Petersen sang. “That’s the snippet I wrote when I journaled this morning.” Her sing-song statement elicited a wide grin from her sister, Geneva Carson.

“I’m thankful you found that journal writing such a help while you were sick,” Geneva commented.

The little catch phrases or quotes Lanae had latched onto after she found out hepatitis C was the cause of her sickness, were the only things that got her through some days.

And reading the Bible, of course.

Lanae glanced at the art-glass design of the sun catcher hanging in the window, a gift from Rainn Harris, Geneva’s fiancé. She compared the pattern with the appliqué cross Geneva was now anchoring onto the background fabric of her current wall quilt.

“I suspect your latest project isn’t meant as a shop item but as a gift for Rainn.”

“You got it.” Geneva lifted her brows to see above the rim of her glasses. “I can’t get over how different you are from a couple months ago. Look at you now, pouring over those singles ads.”

"I'm alive. Praise God." Lanae slapped the newspaper against her lap and waved her open arms toward the ceiling.

Geneva shook her head, an indulgent smile spreading across her face.

"But for God's grace, I could still be caught up in that nightmare illness. I used to wonder if I would ever feel alive or die too sick to enjoy the life I have," Lanae said. She dropped her arms and picked up the paper. Running her finger down a bolded column, she read out loud, "'Men Seeking.' I feel all crocheted out and full of the energy I didn't have while I was sick. We may have opened *Frivolities*, but a lot of it I don't remember. I feel like I slept through it."

Geneva shared a look that took them back to girlhood.

Thank you, Lord, for the comfort I've found in words. And thank You for my sister. Lanae turned back to her newspaper reading. "This guy wants nice legs. I have those...Mmmm, here's a cowboy."

"Do any say if they're Christian?" Geneva asked around the needle between her lips as she measured a length of thread.

"Not yet. Here's an SWM, Single White Male, looking for smarts. Ohhkaaay. I might give this one an answer. He's a ranch owner." Mourning what could have been, Lanae rubbed a spot of newspaper dust off the soft dark leather of her recliner. A life lived out on her own ranch. "Then again, been there, done that, with my rancher." *But he died before the culmination of their life together.* Lanae contemplated the word "dream," sighed over the memory of her deceased husband, and formed a sad smile. The Lord's timing had no explanation.

Their shop, *Frivolities*, was the widowed sisters' joint business venture. When she'd seen the ad in their hometown paper listing a downtown building for sale in Platteville, she jumped at the chance to move back to where she'd been born. Geneva called Lanae in response to the same ad. *Certainly seemed like God's prompting.*

"Remember, it was an ad that helped bring *Frivolities* into existence," Lanae emphasized. "Look, this one says he'll treat you like a lady. Oh boy. A Western lover—books and movies."

"Gotta be a touch of country there."

Lanae loved wide open spaces. She had tried to keep her husband Keith's dream ranch alive after his death. It had slammed into her one day, the sad realization that she no longer had the resources to stick with the ranch. How she missed the expanse. "I'm your dream come true if you love nature and horses.' This sounds good." Lanae glanced at her sister. "He says he likes gospel music."

Geneva laid the colorful fabric in her lap and gave Lanae a look as sharp as the needle she used to accent the appliquéd edges. "You aren't really going to jump on this bandwagon by answering one of those ads, are you?"

"Thinking about it. It's better than taking a chance on one of those dot-com sites, to my way of thinking." Lanae continued to skim the column. "Oh joy. This guy wants a woman to believe in him...and finally, it says he believes in Jesus. Can't buy it, though. He also lists his astrological sign."

"There you go. Satan believes in Jesus, too."

Lanae sighed. Jesus held her future the same as He'd been with her all her life.

“And speaking of ads...” she brushed her fingers to the side.

“Find someone interesting?”

“Across the page here is a little something that would fit in the shop. Listen to this. ‘Oak dressing table. Needs refinishing. Solid. Original glass pulls on fancy drawers. Make offer.’” She raised a brow and met her sister’s glance. “Looks like a Lincoln phone number.”

“Want to check it out in the morning? Beth will be working in the shop for Moselle. If you have a cheesecake ready tonight, you’d be free to drive down to Lincoln in the morning.”

“Think I’ll give them a call later,” Lanae said as she once again buried her nose in the paper.

Besides the gifts, antiques, and frivolities the shop sold, they had an espresso machine and Lanae’s baked goods. Customers came in and experienced...no, savored, their offerings. It was a God-thing, how the idea for the crazy items—Moselle’s handcrafts, Geneva’s quilts and specialty coffees, and Lanae’s crochet and cheesecakes—had come to them at the same time when they’d each seen the building advertised. With the long state of Nebraska between them, each sister had recognized the opportunity to use her skills for profit.

She considered the *Frivolities* women. At the moment, her niece Moselle—the third party in the *Frivolities* venture—was on her honeymoon, or she’d be working on a craft designed from old items right along with them. Mondays, when the shop was closed, weren’t always for leisure. It was their practice to meet as part of their business plan and to work on their contributions to keep *Frivolities* stocked with goodies.

"They must bold these ads with large print so oldies like me can read 'em."

"Yeah, right. You think we're old in our fifties? Aren't you the one who told me we're only as old as we think we are?"

The sisters shared a look that covered a myriad of unspoken thoughts.

"You could find yourself a man. After all, I found my Rainn. That way your guy could do the reading when your eyes go." Geneva's teasing held a dreamy quality.

"If my eyes go, I'll blame it on all that crocheting I did instead of sleeping when I was sick." Lanae flipped the page to see how many more columns the ads covered. None. The singles were confined to one page.

She studied her sister. Geneva looked so pretty in love. She could almost pass for her daughter, Moselle.

"I agree. You got yourself one in a million with your Rainn, my dear Geneva. Like the Elvis quote I read the other day that says we're meant to do something worth remembering. You've sure done that with that sweet man of yours." Lanae drummed her fingers on the paper in her lap. "I believe I am ready to seek my own man, to do my own something-worth-remembering."

"Wait a minute, here." Geneva set her elbow against her hip bone, needle pointed in the air, and gave Lanae a get-real look. "You were married to a Vietnam vet. You held onto the ranch over twenty years after Keith died. I'd call that doing something worth remembering."

"Guess you're right. Not to mention creating *Frivolities* with you. Now that I'm feeling alive again, it might be nice to seriously search for a man of my own.

To warm my winter nights, you know...someone to share it all with.”

“Have to admit, those strong arms of Rainn’s help me feel tucked in safe and warm every night.”

“That sounds interesting. You mean he moved in when I moved out of your house?” Lanae snorted.

“Not funny. Rainn and I say good night even if it’s by phone. And if he’s at the scene of a fire, I have Mia to attend to. So I’m not alone.”

“That girl. Remember how she spelled out her name and pronounced it ‘M-E-ah,’ so we’d all get it right?” They shared reminiscent smiles.

Mia’s mother, Rainn’s sister, was a single mom who died of drug-related, mysterious circumstances in Fort Worth, Texas. Rainn’s parents wanted no part of caring for a child with special needs; so Rainn became custodial caregiver of his six-year-old niece, a special child with autism.

Lanae shook her head and shot another smile at Geneva. She was still trying to wrap her mind around the vast changes in their family over the last few months.

First, her niece, Moselle, had reunited with her high school love, Eric, and married him seventy-two hours ago, the day after Thanksgiving.

Second, Geneva had blossomed every day because of the attention Rainn Harris, Eric’s firefighter buddy, paid her. He’d rescued her from a tree, where she’d climbed after a stray cat. The family still made jokes about it, how she’d fallen into his arms when he rescued her.

Third, Lanae had overcome hep C. “You and I got used to sleeping single in a double bed, Sis. Now I’m going to try with all my might to see if that’s really

God's plan for the rest of my life."

"You may very well have a point. He spared you from a terminal illness." The smile accompanying Geneva's words brought the blessing home. "But don't get too carried away with your own plan instead of waiting on the Lord."

Lanae shot up a silent prayer of thankfulness for her healthy liver and went back to reading the ads out loud. "Here's one. 'Integrity and full of heart.' Meaning, no heart disease, I'll wager." She emitted a throaty, scoffing sound. "Oooh, this one sounds like me. 'Country boy at heart, but caught in town.'"

"If that doesn't sound like you, I'll eat my needle," Geneva mumbled around that sharp object.

"Don't laugh, or you just might," Lanae said. Then she laughed loud enough for both of them.

This particular Monday morning's working session and business meeting had fizzled. Wedding and holiday still filled the atmosphere, so Geneva and Lanae had made short business of their shop-talk duties. They now attended to the creative side of their joint venture, working on individual quilted fabric and crochet items.

Well, Lanae had attempted to work. She'd eventually set aside her crochet hook and picked up the newspaper.

The women closest to Lanae, sister and niece, faced the future with their respective firefighters. The men had their softer sides. Eric sold insurance and built birdhouses for fun. Rainn was a stained glass artist and would soon start teaching at community college.

Dare Lanae follow through with her planned man hunt?

Lord willing.

She had been content with her life. She hadn't faced the loneliness, or missed having a man around, until she witnessed what love did for the two women she loved.

She missed the poignancy of love, how much brighter and happier life could be when shared with the right person. But she was a different person now, living in a different time and place. Maybe God had a new plan for her. But if this was it, she would be happy as long as she followed God's will.

Lanae glanced out the sliding glass door and followed the trail of a dancing cottonwood leaf as it drifted to the ground. "But you know, sis, I really do miss it at times. The ranch. Those open miles where the sun causes a gal to crinkle and wrinkle. The meadowlarks and bugs and wind in my hair."

"What hair?"

"Very funny."

The memory of hair loss sobered Lanae. Her Hep C meds hadn't caused her to lose hers like some cancer treatments did, but her hair sure had thinned. She'd decided to keep her hair short.

Joy and peace now flushed her soul.

She ran her fingertips over the leather chair that offered comfort every time the deep cushions welcomed her. Family and friends had taken up a collection for the recliner, and a grand gift it was. She'd been so overwhelmed with their outpouring of love.

But was the love of God, family, and friends enough for fulfilling relationships? Or was she meant to find a special someone to spend the rest of her days with?

Lanae's gaze traced the blocks in the quilt Geneva

had made, which now graced the wall. Arranged in varied blocks of crosses, surrounding one huge cross in front of a blazing gold light, the teal and mauve colors never failed to warm her heart. The thick quilt had warded off the chill on her legs, originally serving the purpose of lap blanket.

Should she be looking for someone? Or should she leave it to God to bring that special someone to her?

Or, should she, like the biblical Paul, be content with what she had?

Lanae played with the strap of the denim bag Moselle had designed. The tote was created from a pair of old jeans. Lanae tucked away her balls of yarn and current crochet project into the bag.

"I would imagine Moselle and Eric are having a great time about now." Geneva spoke on a wistful sigh as though wishing she was on her own honeymoon.

The sisters exchanged understanding smiles. Lanae's turned into laughter then higher pitched giggles as Geneva's color rose to a deep blush.

Lanae set her tote on a nearby shelf and straightened her journal and daily devotional on the cabinet top. She folded the newspaper in her lap and took in her immediate surroundings.

Eric, her new nephew by marriage, had built the cabinet next to her recliner. Handcrafted in golden oak, the cabinet itself consisted of two shelves and a routed edged top.

The stained-glass sun catcher caught her eye again and she said a prayer of thankfulness for Rainn, her soon-to-be brother-in-law. Sections of amber and pink glass in the shape of a rose formed the backdrop for the amber cross.

Humbled anew at their gifts of love, she realized

yet again how blessed she was to have so many loved ones in her life.

Yet, no special man filled the role of lover.

Lanae slapped her knee with the folded paper and smoothed out the dents. "Onward and upward."

She opened the pages and renewed her perusal of the ads. "'Are you the one for me? Can we be friends first?'"

"A young guy wants an older woman?" Geneva quipped.

"In your dreams," they chorused, caught the other's eye, and giggled.

"Your dream came true," Lanae sassed.

"Lucky me."

"No such thing as luck," they joined voices again; same slight nuance in tone, same inflection, same identical timing.

The sisters shared familial comfort and continued with their individual tasks.

Sage Diamond questioned his decision. Was he making a mistake by letting go of his last solid link to family? He ran his hand over the scarred surface of the dresser. It sure looked different from when he was a kid.

He'd sat on the edge of the bed, still as a nose-twitching rabbit, and watched his mother. She'd perch in front of the mirror and select her various cosmetics and creams. He'd studied the female ritual of applying the contents of those curious jars. The process remained a mystery, to his way of thinking.

Once the dresser was sold and gone, there would

be no more tangible pieces of his childhood. His mother was gone. His aunts had died young. And memories of Uncle Ted had been buried for a long time—along with the family secret.

He took a step back. For sure, if the mirror were attached, he didn't think he could say good-bye.

From the depths of repressed memory, he heard his mother sing to him, by way of answering his questions.

“When I was just a little boy, I asked my mother...”

And with every question he fired, she'd smile, ruffle his hair, and then continue to sing the answer. “What will you be when you grow up?”

They'd continue singing back and forth, suggesting occupations.

He'd long ago given up wondering, or wishing, for anything good, for what or who he'd be the rest of his life.

What was so great about life? People you love die and leave you alone.

He sure never dreamt he'd be a young widower.

How could he have imagined that he'd have a daughter who became a mother as a teen and a grandson whose father was a mystery?

No time to contemplate life's unsolved issues. He had horses to feed.

The first thing Lanae did after Geneva said good night, was to get two cheesecakes in the oven. Then she picked up the phone, curious about the oak vanity.

A nice sounding man with a pleasant voice answered.

"Hi. I'm calling about the dressing table."

"Sure. It's a woman's piece of furniture. Been sitting in the corner of my garage since I moved in."

Lanae tried to picture a face with the voice and came up blank. "Can you tell me a little more about it?"

"It's old. Been in the family for some time. It's turned that dark color that old varnish gets over the years. There are paint splotches and rings from cans. Stuff like that. But it's solid."

"It sounds lovely. Do you know how much you want for it?"

"Well, it's genuine oak, I guess handcrafted, and should look real pretty when you're done refinishing. I was kind of thinking seventy-five, but you'd have to take a look."

"Where can I see it?"

"I'm on acreage southeast of Lincoln."

Hmm, a country boy. By nature or transplanted?

"That'll be a breeze to find. I'm in Platteville. When would be a good time?"

"I'll want my chores out of the way. Would midmorning tomorrow work for you?"

"Sure thing. How about directions?"

Lanae grabbed a pen and wrote down landmarks and turns before ending the call.

With a sigh, she turned her attention back to the smell of baking cheesecakes, which was now curling up the stairs. She had slipped downstairs to make sure the shop was locked up tight. She lived in the loft over the store now that Moselle and Eric would live in his home.

She had never even baked a cheesecake for her husband while he lived. Was there a man to replace

Keith in her future?

Though tired, the joy of adventure bubbled through her as she later prepared for bed.

"Thank You, Lord. Tomorrow I plan to do something more exciting than loop yarn around a crochet hook. Please give me a safe and enjoyable drive through the countryside. Open my eyes to all You have for me to see, to enjoy, to live, to bring glory to You.

"I'm alive. Thank You again, Lord." Lanae snuggled under the covers, and added with a yawn, "And for the ability to look forward to tomorrow."

The prayer calmed her heart, but anticipation filled her mind.

She'd be in the country again.

The guy's phone voice intrigued her. She kicked herself for not asking his name. Could he be single?

She chuckled at herself as she rolled over to get more comfortable. Ah well, it was in God's hands.

The old oak piece would undoubtedly fit right in with the shop's décor as a display nook, maybe even a cranny for their goods. She wondered what kinds of stories the antique vanity could tell.