

Beyond the Picket Fence



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HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
Eugene, Oregon 97402

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Books by Lori Wick

A Place Called Home Series

A Place Called Home

A Song for Silas

The Long Road Home

A Gathering of Memories

The Californians

Whatever Tomorrow Brings

As Time Goes By

Sean Donovan

Donovan's Daughter

Kensington Chronicles

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Who Brings Forth the Wind

The Knight and the Dove

Rocky Mountain Memories

Where the Wild Rose Blooms

Whispers of Moonlight

To Know Her By Name

Promise Me Tomorrow

Contemporary Fiction

Sophie's Heart

Beyond the Picket Fence



*This special book,
my first book of short stories,
is for my mother,*

Pearl Hayes.

*Thank you for the example you are
to me. Thank you for trusting God
even when you can't see tomorrow.*

I love you.





Acknowledgments

A step away from the norm is so fun. I like routine and even like some of the ruts I'm in, but a time-out from the everyday action is great. This book provided that for me, and these are the people I'd like to thank for taking that break with me.

My first note of thanks on this book of short stories is for Carolyn McCready and LaRae Weikert of Harvest House Publishers. In that meeting in Denver, you liked the idea the moment you heard it. And also for Julie Castle, who wasn't in the first meeting, but whose enthusiasm when she heard of this book was just as great. Indeed, she started thinking up cover ideas within moments. Thank you, dear friends, for all the support and encouragement.

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Thank you, Roxie Carley, for your listening ear. You have heard these stories and ideas for dozens more, and yet you never tire. You always listen with patience and enthusiasm, and laugh in all the right places. You're so special to me.

Thank you to my sweet husband, Bob. Thank you for liking my ideas and for trying so hard to make everything in the manuscript look good. I would be lost without your guidance, not just on the computer, but in life. I'm so thankful that we're not a short story. I hope our book will read on for at least 70 years.



Dear Reader

Welcome to my world. *Beyond the Picket Fence* is a small look into the way I exercise my imagination. I might need a break from the book I'm working on, or I just might be between big projects, but when those times come, I work on short stories.

These stories are sprinkled all through my computer in various stages. Some are still at the title stage and others need only a memorable ending. The eight stories in this book are the only ones I've finished. I hope you'll be blessed as you read about special characters that have come to my mind, but whose stories were not long enough to become a full-blown manuscript.

I didn't try to work with a theme or put the stories in any particular order, but I had fun and I hope you will too. I also added small notes about what each story meant to me. I hope these will be special to you as well.

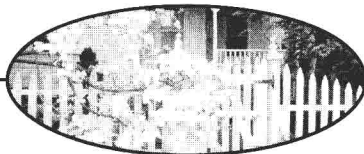
Maybe this book will be just what you need—light, easy to read, something to relax with. Or maybe you'll be challenged in a way that only you and the Lord could know about. In every case, I pray that God will bless you as you read.

Warmly in Christ,

Lori







Be Careful with My Heart

*Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones; praise is
becoming to the upright. Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre;
sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings. Sing to Him a new
song; play skillfully with a shout of joy.*

Psalm 33:1-3



Casey Sheridan rubbed her damp palms down the front of her slacks as the plane taxied to the gate. The ride had been bumpy, but her case of nerves had nothing to do with the ride or landing. However, it felt good to disembark, and Casey walked into the terminal with a determined stride.

Her hesitancy returned when she was met by a sea of unfamiliar faces. She had no idea who was supposed to meet her and wished all of a sudden she had asked about that.

The group began to clear, and still Casey stood alone. She had checked her one piece of luggage and

wondered if she should go and collect the bag or stay where she was. As it was she had no time to decide; a familiar face was headed toward her at a breakneck speed.

"Dan!" Casey's voice showed her relief, and she was grabbed in a bear hug that nearly lifted her off the floor. "What are you doing here? I was sure you'd be with Janelle."

"She refused to leave unless I stayed to see you safely to the church. I only just put her on the plane a few hours ago." His voice was breathless as he spoke, and he was obviously very excited. "Come here and sit down; I'll tell you everything."

Making themselves as comfortable as the airport seating would allow, Dan began. "First of all, what did Janelle tell you on the phone?"

"She said she was pregnant and that the doctor ordered complete bed rest. She had to quit the tour, and would I come and fill in for the last six weeks. Are you sure she's all right? I couldn't tell on the phone if she was telling me everything."

"She wasn't telling all," Dan said with a shake of his head. "A week ago she fainted, and we blamed it on fatigue from our rough tour schedule, but when she fainted again, I rushed her to the hospital. A pregnancy test came out positive, and after the doctor got her dates, he decided she is about three weeks along. She's also severely anemic."

"The doctor kept her in the hospital a few days, and that gave her mom time to get down here. Like I said, they only got away a few hours ago. I'm booked on a flight that leaves tonight after I see you out to the tour."

They sat in silence for a moment before Casey spoke. "Janelle told me she had given up on ever getting pregnant. Now that she actually is, does the doctor think she'll go full term?"

"It's too soon to tell, but the bed rest will help, and she's not spotting or feeling any pain." Dan stopped for a minute and looked intently at Casey. "We want this baby, Casey; we want him so much. I think for the first time I have an inkling of what you have been through."

Casey reached for Dan's hand and squeezed it gently. "I'll pray, Dan. Whatever God has for you will be perfect. Right now you might believe you can't be happy without that baby, but our God is wholly sovereign. Ask Him to help you see that His will is perfect."

The next half hour was spent in retrieving Casey's luggage and then getting to the car. Once on the road, Dan gave Casey a light sketch of what her job was to be.

It started out sounding relatively simple. Janelle played piano for her brothers, the Riley Brothers, a trio specializing in contemporary Christian music, presently touring the southern part of the United States. They had been on the road since May and were near the end of the tour now.

Of the six weeks left in the tour, the first two would be spent doing nightly concerts, for which Casey would be playing the piano in Janelle's stead. The following three weeks would be spent at a summer Bible camp in the mountains. The last week was reserved for a few days of vacation and getting the bus home to northern California.

Casey was needed to play for the group during the evening meetings at camp but would have her weekends free. Janelle and the three men of the Riley trio were also scheduled to be camp counselors. Again, Casey would be expected to take Janelle's place. Casey had listened in silence up to this point, but her eyes widened at this bit of news. She turned her head and stared at Dan in something akin to panic.

"Now, don't get excited, Casey," he reassured her when he glanced over and saw her look. "You'll do just fine. The first week is fifth- and sixth-grade girls, the second is seventh and eighth, and the final week is high school, freshman and up. I think you'll love it."

Casey continued to stare wordlessly at him until he began to squirm. "Well, I mean, I hope you'll like it. You get along well with everyone, and I'm sure the girls will look to you for spiritual guidance, and, you know, look up to you as a woman." Dan stumbled to a halt as Casey continued to stare at him.

"Why do I get the feeling I'm in for six weeks I will never forget? If I hadn't seen the sincerity in your face, I would say Janelle staged this whole thing to get me out more."

Casey was again staring at the man behind the wheel, but Dan was saved from replying as he pulled off the freeway and into busy downtown traffic. Within minutes he was parking the car in a large church parking lot. A huge silver touring bus was parked across many spaces, and Casey felt nervous at having to meet all the people that bus would surely hold.

She began to muse, not for the first time, at how strange it was that even though the Riley family had been to visit Janelle, Casey had never met them. She and Janelle lived in the same town and were close friends, but each time the Rileys were in town, Casey had been away.

Casey and Janelle's mutual love for music caused them to hit it off on their first meeting. It wasn't long before Casey was sharing with Janelle things that she shared with few people. Janelle's husband, Dan Green, turned out to be as precious as his dear wife, and the three of them enjoyed each other's company immensely.

"Who is taking your job as manager, Dan?" Casey asked as they crossed the lot toward the building.

"Brad." Brad was the oldest of the trio, and Casey knew him only by name. "His wife, Chris, is along, and between the two of them, they'll manage with only two more weeks of actual road tour."

The inside of the church was cool and spacious, and as they walked through the foyer, Casey's head turned in all directions, taking in the visitor's table, bulletin board, and other things familiar to most church lobbies. Before she knew it, they were at the sanctuary doors. Casey wasn't sure she was ready but followed Dan inside.

The introductions were awkward, and the musically talented family she was meeting was little help. Brad and Chris came forward and shook her hand, and Casey appreciated the gesture even if their smiles were a bit sad, but Casey met Hunter from his place at the piano. He stood but did not come forward to shake her

hand. Morgan, the youngest member of the group, was even less cordial. He did not stand or move out of his seat but nodded slightly as they were introduced.

Casey's mind scrambled around for everything Janelle had ever told her about her brothers. She knew that Brad and Chris had children but that Hunter was a widower. Morgan was not married, but she thought he might be engaged.

Casey's mind was still moving when Stan, Brice, Rich, and Terry were also introduced. Casey was to learn later that they were in charge of the bus as well as all sound and operating equipment.

Walking Dan back out to his car, Casey felt like a child being left alone for her first day of kindergarten. She tried to hide her misgivings behind a bright smile, but he was not fooled.

"Listen, Casey, most people think the people in Christian singing groups are all saints. But in truth these men are hurting right now. It doesn't really have anything to do with you; it's just that they've never toured without Janelle, and they don't think anyone can play like she can." Dan chuckled before he continued. "They didn't believe her when she said you played better than she did."

"She told them that?" Casey nearly groaned.

It was Dan's turn to stare. He shook his head slowly as he spoke. "You really don't realize the depth of your musical ability, do you? I love my wife, and I think she plays beautifully, but Casey, I've never heard *anyone* play a piano like you do."

Casey could only stare at him before looking away in confusion. Playing the piano was no effort for her,

and she was more than a little guilty of taking her talent for granted.

"You'd better go, Dan," Casey said, breaking the silence. "Please give Janelle my love and tell her I'll do my best."

Thinking about the people inside, Casey stood for a time after Dan drove away. *Please, Lord, comfort them at this time. Help them to accept Your will in this. Please give me the right attitude and words if needed. And most of all, Lord, help me to glorify You with this talent I take for granted.*



"What did you think of her?" The question came from Brad as he faced his brothers, his wife, Chris, by his side.

"It's not whether or not we like her, Brad; it's just hard to go on without Janelle. And we really don't know if she can play. I feel a little funny about that," Morgan said quietly, and for a time everyone was silent.

Hunter broke into the quiet. "I'm sure Jan would never send us anyone who couldn't do the job, but like Morgan said, it seems strange not to have Jan here. Dan said he'd call as soon as he got home, but I'd give anything to be there myself."

Conversation came to an awkward halt as the group watched Casey come back into the room. She was completely unaware that the uncertainty she was feeling was clearly written on her face.



Sixty minutes later Casey had changed into a comfortable pair of baggy shorts and a cotton top. She'd noticed on the first introduction that everyone was dressed casually, and with the temperature in the 90's, Casey welcomed the change.

At Chris' suggestion, Casey had stowed her belongings in the bus. Chris had been wonderful, showing her around the bus and talking to her like an old friend. The men had some errands to run, so the two women had lunched together in the bus. Most of the conversation during the meal was taken up with talk about Chris and Brad's two girls. They hadn't seen them in weeks and couldn't wait to arrive at camp where they planned to meet.

"My parents are bringing them up," Chris explained. "We talk on the phone every few days, but it's not the same."

"Tell me how old they are again." Casey asked with genuine interest.

"Kim is 13, and Linda is 10."

"And they're with their grandparents?"

"Right. My folks come and live at our house when we tour, so the kids have the security of being home. I flew home almost a month ago to see them, but we won't be with them again until they come to camp." Chris' eyes were suspiciously wet, and Casey smiled in understanding.

From that point the conversation moved to topics far and wide, and Casey found herself relieved that Chris had not pressed her to share about her own