

lisa samson

Romancing
Hollywood
Nobody

Book 3

a novel

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Other Young Adult Books by Lisa Samson

Finding Hollywood Nobody

Hollywood Nobody

Apples of Gold: A Parable of Purity

Dedication

For Erin B. MARIE Hagerty

Proud to share a name
with one of my all-time
favorite people! Ever.

Love, Aunt Bee

Acknowledgments

Thanks to everyone at Nav, Erin Healy of course, and to all my family and friends, especially those eighteen and under!

Monday, April 30, 6:00 a.m.

My eyes open. Yes, yes, yes. The greatest man in the entire world is brewing coffee right here in the TrailMama.

“Dad.”

“Morning, Scotty. The big day.”

“Yep.”

“And this time, you won’t have to drive.”

I throw back the covers on my loft bed and slip down to the dinette of our RV. My dad sleeps on the dinette bed. He’s usually got it turned back into our kitchen table by 5:00 a.m. What can I say? The guy may be just as much in love with cheese as I am, but honestly? Our body clocks are about as different as Liam Neeson and Seth Green.

You know what I mean?

And we have lots of differences.

For one, he’s totally a nonfiction person and I’m fiction all the way. For two, he has no fashion sense whatsoever. And for three, he has way more hope for people at the outset than I do. Man, do I have a lot to learn on that front.

He hands me a mug and I sip the dark liquid. I was roasting coffee beans for a while there, but Dad took the mantle upon himself and he does a better job.

Starbucks Schmarbucks.

He hands me another mug and I head to the back of the TrailMama to wake up Charley. My grandmother looks so sweet in the morning, her frosted, silver-blond hair fanned out on the pillow. You know, she could pass for an aging mermaid. A really short one, true.

I wave the mug as close as I can to her nose without fear of her rearing up, knocking the mug and burning her face. “Charley . . .” I singsong. “Time to get a move on. Time to get back on the road.”

And boy is this a switch!

All I can say is, your life can be going one way for years and years and then, snap-snap-snap-in-a-Z, it looks like it had major plastic surgery.

Only in reverse. Imagine life just getting more and more real. I like it.

Charley opens her eyes. “Hey, baby. You brought me coffee. You get groovier every day.”

She’s a hippie. What can I say?

And she started drinking coffee again when I ran away last fall in Texas. I mean, I didn’t *really* run away. I went somewhere with a perfectly good reason for not telling anyone, and I was planning to return as soon as my mission was done.

She scootches up to a sitting position, hair still in a cloud, takes the mug and, with that dazzling smile still on her face (think Kate Hudson) sips the coffee. She sighs.

“I know,” I say. “How did we make it so long without him?”

“Now that he’s with us, I don’t know. But somehow we did, didn’t we, baby? It may not have always been graceful and smooth, but we made it together.”

I rub her shoulder. “Yeah. I guess you could say we pretty much did.”

The engine hums its movin’-on song. “Dad’s ready to pull out. Let’s hit it.”

“Scotland, here we come.”

Scotland? Well, sort of.

An hour later

This has been a great school year. In addition to the online courses I'm taking through Indiana University High School, Dad's been teaching me and man, is he smart. I'm sure most sixteen-(almost seventeen)-year-olds think their fathers are the smartest guys in the world, but in my case it happens to be true.

Okay, even I have to admit he probably won't win the Nobel Prize for physics or anything, but he's street smart and there's no replacing that sort of thing. Big plus: he knows high school math. We're both living under the radar. And he's taken our faux last name. Dawn. He's now Ezra Fitzgerald Dawn. After Ezra Pound, one of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Lost Generation friends.

I'm just lovin' that.

"Your mom would have loved the name change, Scotty."

He told me about his life as an FBI agent, some of the cases he worked on, and well, I'd like to tell you he had a life like Sydney Bristow's in *Alias*, but he probably spent most of his time on computer work and sitting around on his butt waiting for someone to make a move. The FBI, apparently, prefers to trick people more than corner them in showdowns and shootouts. The Robertsman case was his first time undercover in the field and we know how terribly that worked out for him. And me. And Charley. And Babette, my mother.

I pull out my math book and sit in the passenger seat of the TrailMama. "Ready for some 'rithmetic, Dad?"

"You bet." He turns to me and smiles. His smile still makes my heart warm up like a griddle ready to make smiley-face pancakes. I flip on my book light.

It's still dark and we're headed to Asheville, North Carolina for Charley's latest shoot. A film about Bonnie Prince Charlie called *Charlie's Lament*. How ironic is that? The director, Bartholomew (don't dare call him Bart) Evans, is a real jerk. I'm not going to be hanging around the set much even though Liam Neeson is Lord George Murray, the voice of reason Prince Charlie refused to listen to. But hey, that's my history lesson. We're still on math.

I finish up the last lesson in geometry . . . finally! Honestly, I still don't understand it without a mammoth amount of help, but the workbook's filled and that's a good thing.

There.

I set down my pen. "Finished!"

Dad gives a nod as he continues to look out the windshield. You might guess, despite the tattoos, piercings, and his gleaming bald head, he's a very careful driver. And he won't let me drive like Charley did.

"So . . . driver's license then, right?"

He's been holding that over my head so I'd finish the math course.

"You know it. After the film, we'll request your new birth certificate and go from there."

"What state are we supposedly from?" The FBI has given us a new identity, official papers and all that.

"Wyoming."

"Are you kidding me? Wyoming? Why?"

"Think about it, honey. Who's from Wyoming?"

"Lots of people?"

"Know any of them?"

"Uh. No."

"See?"

“Okay, Wyoming it is, then.”

“You realize you’ll only have my beat-up old black truck to drive around.” The same truck we’re towing behind the TrailMama.

“I’ll take it.”

So here’s the thing. The rest of the entire world thinks my father was shot in the chest and killed when he was outed by a branch of the mob he was after. This mob was financing James Robertsman’s campaign for governor of Maryland.

The guy’s running for president of the United States now.

I kid you not.

Wish I was kidding.

We thought he was after us for several years because Charley knew too much. But then last fall, we found out the guy chasing me was my father, and Robertsman is most likely cocky enough to think he took care of everything he needed. I say that’s quite all right. Although, I have to admit, the fact that a dirtbag like that guy may end up in the Oval Office sickens me to no end.

Thanks to that guy, we had been running in fear from my own father.

The thing is, I could be really mad about all those wasted years, and a portion of me feels that way. But we’ve been given another chance, and I’ll be darned if I throw away these days being angry. There’s too much to be thankful for.

Don’t get me wrong. I still have my surly days. I don’t want Dad and Charley to think they have it as easy as all that!

Okay, time to blog.

Hollywood Nobody: April 30

Let's cut to the chase, Nobodies!

Today's Seth News: It's official. Seth Haas and Karissa Bonano are officially each other's exclusive main squeeze. The two were seen coming out of a popular LA tattoo parlor with each other's names on the inside of their forearms. How cliché. And pass the barf bag.

Today's Violette Dillinger Report: Violette has broken up with Joe Mason of Sweet Margaret. She wanted you all to know that long-distance romances are hard for any couple, but especially for people as young as she is. "Joe needed to live his life. I'm on the road a lot. It wasn't fair to either of us." Sounds like she's definitely not on the road to Britney. I'm just sayin'.

Today's Rave: Mandy Moore. The girl can really sing! And her latest album is filled with good songs. The bubble gum days of insipid teen heartbreak are over. She's finally come into her own. (Wish some others would follow her example, but I won't hold my breath. And man, are we on the theme of bratty stars today or what? Well, there are just so many of them from which to choose!)

Today's Rant: Crazy expensive celebrity weddings. What? If they spend more, will they be more likely to stay together? I have no idea. Mariah Carey's \$25,000 dress pales in comparison to Catherine Zeta-Jones's \$100,000 gown. What are those things made of?

Today's Quote: "Dream as if you'll live forever, live as if you'll die today." James Dean

Well, if that's the case, Mr. Dean, pass the guacamole Doritos and let's forget about college!

Later!

Later

Text message from Seth. Oh brother.

Seth: Hey ScTTY.

Me: Hey, Mr. New Tattoo.

Seth: U saw?

Me: All over the tabloids.

Seth: Yeah.

Me: So you're going to marry her?

Seth: I dnt knw.

Oh sheesh.

Me: Tattoo removal is quite painful I hear.

Seth: Where r u?

Me: On our way to NC and another shoot. Scottish romance.

Seth: Cool. Im filmng in Nrth Dkota tomrw.

Me: Karissa joining you?

Seth: Yes. Shes btwn flms.

Me: Of course she is.

Seth: ScTTY, my moms cancer is bck.

Crap! Why was I being so mean? It always bites me in the behind when I'm mean.

Me: Oh my gosh, Seth. I'm so sorry.

I call him and he picks up right away.

"What happened?"

"She had her yearly checkup and it was back."

"Is it bad?"

"She starts chemo right away."

"I'm really sorry, Seth. You can't know how much."

"No, I think I do. You know what it's like to lose your mother."

"She's not going to die."

"I hope you're right."

"When did you find out?"

"Last week. I knew you'd at least pray for her. And Dad too."

"And you."

"Yeah. I guess."

What we both don't say is that Karissa won't pray. She'd probably laugh at Seth for even asking. But I'm not going to go there. Even I know that would be over the line.

"Hey, I gotta go," he says. "I've got a lot of packing to do before I catch my flight."

"Okay. Keep me posted, Seth."

"I will."

He's silent for a moment. Then, "Scotty?"

"Yeah?"

"I know I'm not the greatest friend in the world. I know I

dissed you in Marshall and I wanted to apologize.”

“Apology accepted.”

Notice I didn’t say, “That’s okay.” Because it wasn’t okay. And it still isn’t. But I forgive him. Seth is my brother figure. I only get so mad at him because I don’t want him to do things he’ll regret. And he’s going to regret Karissa. Oh man, someday he’s going to wish he never laid eyes on that girl.

And honestly? I’m still crushing on him a little bit. He’s too old for me, yeah, I get it.

I set down my phone on the dashboard. “Wow.”

“What is it?” Charley asks from where she sits at the dinette looking at my computer for old-time food from Scotland. I hate to tell her, but it’s going to be a lot of meat, and with her being a vegan and all, oh my gosh. It’s not going to be a good shoot.

“Seth’s mom’s cancer has returned.”

“Oh no.” Dad.

“Is Seth upset?” Charley. “Never mind. Of course he is.”

“I dunno. He went and got tattoos with Karissa the day before yesterday.”

Dad shakes his head. “That doesn’t mean he isn’t hurting, honey. The fact that he did something so permanent could be construed that he’s hurting a great deal.”

“It’s true.” Charley.

Maybe I need to learn to give Seth the benefit of the doubt. I text him again.

Me: Can I have your mom’s address? I want to send her a card.

But I don’t hear back. He’s probably on his way to the airport,

picking up the Karissa along the way in his new convertible Volvo. It's a beauty. Too bad the beast will be sitting in the passenger seat.

Noon

Well, the moratorium on cheese has been lifted! Charley has relegated all those decisions to Dad and thank goodness for that. We're sitting in an Arby's in Petersburg, Virginia. Dad's eating a bacon cheddar roast beef, and I've got a double order of mozzarella sticks. Charley's in the camper eating beans and brown rice. "Don't ask me to witness the carnage," she said.

Dad laughed and gave her a hug. Charley needs more hugs than just I can give her, and Dad's happy to provide. He's a very huggy person. I can totally see why my mother fell for him. And the pictures of him as a young man? Totally a hottie. He was thin back then, and the hair that's now nonexistent (yes, he shaves his head, but still) was clipped short, allowing his dark curls to frame his brow. It's amazing what fourteen years will do to a person, but honestly, I don't care. He's my Dad. And his smile is still the greatest thing. You just can't change that. Besides, he's still got his good teeth. He took us all to the dentist this winter and man, did I have some cavities despite the fact that Charley limited my sugar intake. Sometimes you just can't fight genetics.

He pulls out a blue spiral-bound notebook and takes a sip of coffee. "Okay, we've checked out all the morgue records east of the Mississippi. Nothing matching Babette."

So there's hope, maybe?

"And you really don't think they would have done anything farther west?"

"No, honey. They stick to their territory. I was particularly worried about the East Coast. But nothing."

I inhale deeply. "So what's next?"

"Well, I talked with the agent who's on it all right now."

"They're still working on Robertsman?"

"Of course. He's slippery. So slippery that everybody knows that someday he's going to slip up. It's our greatest hope with this sort of thing."

I pick up a mozzarella stick. "Can they get him on income-tax evasion or something?"

He laughs. "Oh, Scotty. I think he's smarter than Al Capone was."

"True. So what did the agent say?"

"He hasn't heard a thing concerning your mom, but he did give me a list of Robertsman's favorite hangouts." He raises one brow.

"No, Dad. I know what you're thinking. It's too dangerous."

"Perhaps."

Now, if you could see what my dad really looks like, his choice of the word "perhaps" is comical. He should be saying, "No kidding," or, "Yeah, yeah, yeah."

I bite down on my stick. He bites into his sandwich.

You see, here's the thing. We talk about this, and it's serious stuff, don't get me wrong. But it's our life. We talk about serious things over food, on the road, wherever we are. And it isn't callous, and it doesn't make these matters less important. It's just part of who we are.

“So you’re going to hang out around these places?”

“On the weekends.”

“Of course.”

“I do have my day job and you to consider.”

“I know, Dad. It was your MO finding me.”

“Exactly.”

“How will you get there?”

“I’ll fly back and forth. Rent a car.”

I sip my water. “Isn’t that expensive?”

“Yes. But I’ve saved up enough over the years.”

We sit in silence for a while, chewing on our food and our thoughts.

“So what are some of the places?”

“Well, there’s a restaurant in Little Italy.”

“Figures.”

“I know. But there you have it. The main one is called Mama Agnese’s.”

“Agnes? Doesn’t that mean *holy*?”

“Uh-huh. Ironic, isn’t it?”

I smash the cheese-stick box. “Remember that scene in *The Godfather* where people are out doing a hit and Al Pacino is in church promising to defend the faith and live a holy life for the child who’s being baptized as his godchild?”

“What are you doing watching that movie at your age?”

“Oh, please, Dad. Think about it. I was living with Charley. I could’ve gotten away with a whole lot more.”

“I understand it. I don’t have to like it, honey.”

“True. Anyway, how do people go to church and all, make holy promises before God, and then just go about the evil business?”

He shakes his head. “I don’t know. Robertsman is the same,

Scotty. Never misses a Sunday at his church.”

I rest my chin in my palm. “I don’t get it.”

“Me either.”

“Will you be careful?”

“I’m trained in this sort of thing.”

“Yeah, and look where it got you last time.”

“Hey, I’m alive aren’t I?”

Okay, there is that, I suppose.

“Are you going to tell Charley what you’re doing?”

“Yes. She deserves to know.”

“She’ll worry like crazy.”

“Of course she will. Mothers deserve to worry about their children.”

I consider that. He’s right. “Do you think, if Mom is still alive, that she worries about me?”

“Oh, I’d say you can count on that.”

“Dad? What if she’s not alive? What do we do then?”

He shakes his head. “It’ll take a while to get over it. But we’ll be together, Scotty. We’ll do what we have to do.”

It’s true.

Man, I can’t get over how much my life has changed in just one year.

“Ready to hit the road?” he asks.

“Let’s go.”

Five o'clock

The landscape is breathtaking. I know that sounds cliché, but honestly, I've sucked in my breath at least a dozen times since we've entered the Great Smoky Mountains. Amazing. Even Charley had to look up from her planning and stare out the picture window by the dinette.

"Do you have the address for the campground?" I ask.

"Yes." She flips to the front of her notebook. As flighty as she can seem—and yes, she's sitting there in a caftan of bright orange, gold, and hot-pink paisley with her silver-blond hair in two braids—she keeps detailed notes for each shoot. Each shoot gets a separate binder. This one is lime green.

She shoots off the address and I Google Map it. We're only fifteen minutes away. Yes!

I hop on the Fireside Campground website. Right in the mountains. The scenery is far-reaching and well, yes, breathtaking. "It does sort of look like Scotland."

"It's why a lot of Scots settled in the area," Dad says from the driver's seat.

"So, who's starring in it besides Liam Neeson?" I ask. Love the guy.

Charley's eyes light up, and her eyes never light up during conversations about actors. In her line of work, they're mostly a necessary evil, even though she's too nice to admit it out loud. "Anthony Harris."

"Whoa." Dad.

"Are you kidding me?"

"Why would I kid about that?" she asks.