

The Train to
Omaha

The Train to
Omaha

A NOVEL

diane harper



REDEMPTION
PRESS

© 2012 by Diane Harper. All rights reserved.

Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without the prior permission of the copyright holder, except as provided by USA copyright law.

All Scripture, unless otherwise indicated, is taken from the *New American Standard Bible*. Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, The Lockman Foundation, La Habra, CA.

Facilitation Biblical Healing, copyright 2002 Cooter, Rice, Stoner. Sources used with permission.

Forgiven and Set Free, Cachrane, Linda, Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1996. Copyright 1986, 1991, 1996, by Care Net. Sources used with permission.

“A Preborn Child’s Conversation With His Heavenly Father,” Della Baker Hutto, March 1994. Copyright 2002 Cooter, Rice, Stoner. Used with permission.

“The Way We Were,” 1973, Bergman, Alan, Bergman, Marilyn, and Hamlich, Marvin.

ISBN 13: 978-1-63232-373-6

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2011918843



dedication

To Jeanette Hanscome...

A godly woman and a beautiful writer,
who has been my mentor, coach, editor,
and a sweet sister in the Lord.
This book would not be without you.



Acknowledgments

MY HEARTFELT APPRECIATION to:

My best friend, my husband, for his love, encouragement, and support, and for being my 'editor in chief' for everything I've ever written.

Reno Christian Writers critique group for all their helpful suggestions and spurring me on to finish the train trip!

This book was written by my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through me, to bring the hope of healing to others.



prologue

TED

THE STRAINS OF the last chord of the *Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major, Op. 83*, faded into silence. The eruption of the audience followed, on their feet, *bravos* rang out amid the thunderous applause. “Encore, Encore.”

No, no, I can't play another note. Ted got up off the bench, shook the beaming conductor's hand, shook the concert master's hand, bowed to the orchestra, bowed to the audience, exited the stage...*please stop clapping...back out to bow again...smile; they loved you.* The conductor indicated to play an encore. Ted heard himself say something about the piece. *What did I just say? Play, bow, bow, leave. Not another encore. No more, I need to focus, focus on something besides concerts, hotels, receptions, rehearsals, living out of a suitcase. They love me, but they don't know me. I'm tired, this isn't fun anymore. God...I'm...lonely.*



The penthouse suite in Harrah's hotel was luxurious, high-end in every detail but none of it registered with Ted. He didn't even see the huge, luscious basket of fruit, the champagne, nor the floral arrangement. It was just another empty hotel room. Slouched in an overstuffed chair, he grabbed his cell phone.

"Stan? It's Ted. Just finished the Reno gig. As usual they loved me, but I need some time off."

"Yes, I can understand that." Stan went into the standard agent reply. "A couple weeks will work into the schedule."

"No, Stan. I need more than that—months, maybe."

"That's not possible!"

Ted looked at his schedule. "Cancel the concert in Dallas in two weeks. Tell them I'm in need of rest. And according to my calendar the next month's concerts are benefits that can be canceled. That would give me six weeks at least.

"Stan, I'll level with you. You know that gorgeous cello solo that begins the third movement? It is the place in this, my favorite concerto, that heals and refreshes my soul. I just sit at the keyboard allowing the cello and orchestra to replenish what has drained out. It didn't happen this time. I don't even remember joining back in with the orchestra. I must have, as everyone said the concerto's performance was spectacular. I don't remember what I said to the audience about the encore or even what I played. That's scary!" Ted's sigh was audible. "Maybe I'll retire."

Stan's response broke the pointed silence.

"Ted, you're on top." Stan gasped. "You have many more years ahead of you. Horowitz performed right into his eighties, right up to the end."

"Well, I'm not him and I'm sure he needed a rest now and then."

"I have been worried about you. You'll be happy to know the Dallas manger called to cancel. It seems their conductor up and died and they are all in a state of shock. By the way, how was the group in Reno? Such a hick town, any good musicians? Why did you agree to go there in the first place?"

“In answer to your first question, the Reno Philharmonic is a top-notch orchestra. The conductor also conducts the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. They are all first-class performers. They were good to me and for me. The reason I agreed to go there is I wanted to ride the train.”

“You what! Ride what train? Now I am really worried about you.” Stan’s voice shook.

“The Virginia and Truckee steam engine out of Virginia City, you know, the Comstock Lode, silver mining?”

“Okay, okay, I guess that’s not too weird. Then what are your plans?”

“I’d rather not say.”

“Oh, come on, Ted, it can’t be any big deal. After all, I’m the only family you’ve got, besides being your agent. I have a right to know.”

“Only if you promise you will not hassle me with emails and voice mails. I’ll keep in touch.”

“Okay, I promise. Now where are you going after your steam train trip?” Stan’s voice dripped sarcasm.

“I’m taking the train to Omaha.”

BETH

The kitchen was perfect, a picture right out of *Better Homes and Gardens*. They had, or rather she had, remodeled last year. The fresh look had beadboard white cabinets with glass fronts and a huge island with prep sink. The windows had been enlarged to give a light, airy feel. Bill just couldn’t understand why she was so enthralled with the farm kitchen look. And the cost...that had been another issue. She had pointed out to him that opening up the kitchen like this was advantageous because of all the faculty entertaining they did. Standing at the large farm sink, a cold cup of coffee in her hand, she was jarred back to consciousness as the song on the radio repeated those words... “the way we were.” They had seen the movie when it first came out in the ’70s. They saw it several more times and were so moved by the sadness of the broken relationship between Barbra Streisand and Robert Redford that they

cried. And then the line...“memories, water colored memories... the painful ones we choose to forget...” The empty kitchen echoed back as she snapped off the radio.

What has happened to us? How did we get to this place of nothingness, this deadly silence between us?

Bill burst into the kitchen for more coffee, bringing Beth back to reality.

“Beth, I’m planning a trip for us,” Bill said in his professor voice as if announcing an upcoming exam.

“Where are we going?” Beth answered with an equal lack of emotion.

“You know how I’ve always wanted to take a train trip somewhere. Well, that grad student I had a few years ago, Tim Olson, is scheduled for his orals on his dissertation. He invited us to come. And I was asked to give a lecture at a Ph.D. seminar.”

Can’t we ever go anywhere without it being career orientated? Beth thought.

“So, where are we going?” Beth asked hopefully, thinking of some prestigious university traveling on the American equivalent of the Orient Express.

“We’re taking the train to Omaha.”

NICOLE

God, all I can say is wow! I can’t believe how you have blessed me, in spite of all I’ve done. I just pray I’m making the right decision by moving. I’m trusting You. Please help me now to explain this to Trevor, this move...



“Trevor, would you like to go on a train trip?” Nicole spoke tentatively, not sure how he would react.

“What train?” Trevor looked at his mother, eyes wide with excitement.

“The train that runs through town, the big one.”

“Wow, let’s go!” Trevor started to hop up.

“We are going to take the train to move to a new town.” Nicole tried to sound positive, even though she wasn’t sure this was the right thing to do.

“I don’t want to leave Jimmy and Spencer. They’re my best buddies.” His voice trembled.

“Sweetheart, I know you love your friends, but I think it would be fun to live some place different, meet new friends.”

“But I don’t want new friends.” Tears welled up in Trevor’s eyes.

“This will be an adventure.”

“How long will this adventure last?” Trevor looked worried.

Nicole had to think fast. “I know what let’s do. We will get out the map of the United States.” He loved maps and was always full of questions about other parts of the country. “First we will look at the different places the train travels to. Then we will match them up with the money Mommy has saved to see how far we can go, which towns and states will work. We will write each town on a piece of paper, put them in a basket, and you can pick our new home.”

Trevor loved games, and surprises. The idea of getting to pick the place they would move to clearly cheered him up.

“Okay.”

They spread the map out on the floor, covering all the space in their tiny living room. Then they checked the tracks on the map to each town that would fit with Nicole’s budget. They found eight places they could go. Nicole helped Trevor write each name on a piece of paper.

“Provo, that’s a funny name, and Klamath Falls is weird.” Trevor giggled.

“Klamath is an Indian name and is here in Oregon.” Nikki showed him on the map. “I will help you write Tacoma, Salem, Vancouver, Omaha, Seattle, and Portland on slips of paper and we will put them in the basket.”

Trevor really got the giggles when he heard the rest of the names as she showed him where the towns were on the map. Nikki got caught up in the silliness of it all. *I think this is going to be okay. I think we can do this.* The pieces of paper went into the basket.

“Are you ready to pick our new town?”

“I’m ready!” Trevor yelled, closing his eyes tight.

He reached in, shuffling the pieces around and settled on one, handing it to his mother.

“We will be moving to and...” Nicole hesitated, adding to the suspense, “taking the train to Omaha!”

COLLEEN

Colleen put her cell phone down and sank into one of the few places left to sit in their almost-empty living room. She felt the tears begin. So many memories...their first house, the only home the twins had known. She remembered when they first moved in and how they had laughed at what they called “early American cocktail drapes,” the first thing to change. And then there was the color of the rooms, government “easy-eye green.” They had done so much to the house and now it would soon be an empty shell, *like me*, she thought. With Dave gone she had tried hard to pull herself together for the children’s sake. Somehow with help from her church family and friends, they had made it through the first awful year. Emotionally the twins were doing better, even though she wasn’t sure how they were doing on the inside. But financially they were at the bottom. Tomorrow loomed ahead with no answers. She trusted God for their needs and that they wouldn’t be homeless. But she also believed it was time to get past wallowing in self-pity and begin to look ahead to how she would provide for her children. It was time for the charity to stop. So she had decided to sell what few things of value they had and pack for a move. She had finally given in to the pleas of her parents to come and live with them until she could get a job and find a place for them to live. But it wasn’t going to be easy. The twins burst through the door, home from a friend’s. Anna and Aaron both started talking at once.

“Mom, did you do it? When are we going to Grandma and Grandpa’s?” Their blue eyes sparkled as they danced around the room.

“Yes, I finally did it.” Colleen smiled at their excitement. “As soon as we get everything sold and packed, we will be taking the train to Omaha.”



chapter one

MOLLY, I'M SO terrified and excited all at once, just a mixed bag of emotions. This is so scary." Nikki clutched Trevor's hand even tighter. "I can't believe I'm waiting for the train to take us away from all we have ever known."

Nikki noticed the bag of snacks that had slipped from her hand and quickly retrieved it.

"The food would not be a good thing to leave behind!"

"I'm excited for you, though I'm going to miss you something awful. You and Trevor will be fine; God is going with you." Molly squeezed her hand. "You've come such a long way, Nikki. I'm so proud of you. Quick, give me a hug. You too, Trevor." The group hug broke up as the tears began.

"Bye, stay in touch." Molly shouted over her shoulder as she sprinted away.

They took the elevator down to the train platform. The waiting area was already beginning to fill up with an interesting mix of travelers. Nikki noticed a very large young man with a gargantuan sport bag stating he was part of the *Reno Zephyrs*. There were several grandma types being put on the train by daughters and grandkids. A very well-dressed couple seemed out of place. The lady conductor gave them boarding instructions, checked their

tickets, asked where they were going, and gave them a seating tag to put over their seats.

Trevor pulled away, heading for a large structure in the middle of the waiting area. “Mom, look at this. What is it?”

“Wow, this is huge! Well, let’s see. It looks like a fountain, a very old one. See, there are drinking fountains on each side. Look at the color it has turned over the years, I think it’s called patina.” She looked up. “See the lights at the top? It must have been part of keeping things lit at night. It tells all about it on the poster over here. I’ll read it to you.” They walked over to the poster. “It is the Reno City Drinking Fountain. It is fourteen feet high made in cast iron. It is 102 years old. It was given to the city by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union.”

“The women’s what? Trevor interrupted.

“The Women’s Christian Temperance Union was a ladies group that was opposed to drinking things like beer.”

“Oh.” He turned back to stare at the fountain.

“It was also given by the Red Cross society as a memorial of the Spanish-American War. It was placed at the southwest corner of Virginia and Plaza Streets. In 1932 it was moved to Idlewild Park and placed in front of the California Building. It was restored in 2005 and moved to the train station.”

“Wow, how did they get this huge thing in here? We’ve been to that park, haven’t we, Mom. What’s that big tray filled with water hanging on the side?”

“It’s a water trough for the horses to have a drink, while the people use the fountains on each side.”

“Horses?” Trevor’s eyes grew wide.

“Yes, horses. There were not many cars here in 1908.”

They heard the train pulling in. Everyone began to collect belongings, crowding towards the door and moving out to the platform to board the train.

“Here’s the train. Let’s go!” Trevor excitedly yelled, grabbing Nikki’s hand.

Why am I leaving my best friend who has been there for me, through it all? I don’t know a soul in Omaha. God, give me courage.

The train was booked. Nikki struggled with their bags and keeping a tight hold on Trevor. They found their seats, giggling, as he had said they looked like packed donkeys.

“Mommy where are we going to sit?” Trevor surveyed the pillows, snacks, and bags of belongings.

“The big bags have a special place on each car. I’ll find it; you stay here. Do not leave this seat.” Nikki’s voice was firm.

Finally settled, Nikki enjoyed watching as others found their seats and struggled to find places for everything. She was hoping there would be other children on the train for Trevor to play with. Another mom would be wonderful to visit with.

What in the world am I going to do when I get to Omaha?



Ted had never taken a train trip before. Old trains like the V&T were one thing, but this was a new experience. Of course he had booked a compartment. He needed rest from people and was hoping that by choosing this venue he could remain anonymous. He just wanted to be alone, to think, and try to figure out who he was, not as the world knew him. Totally unaware of fellow passengers, he found his compartment, dropped his bag, closed the door, and sank into the seat. He was still amazed how the Reno Phil gig had coincided with the V&T train ride. They usually didn’t run the train in winter, but this was a special trip because of the track being completed from Virginia City to Carson City. And the frosting on the cake had been the ride at the Nevada State Railroad Museum in the beautifully restored V&T McKen Motorcar #22. In its day it had taken passengers from Reno to Minden. The weather had even cooperated: cold, but dry and sunny.

God, I’m tired. Why in the world did I pick Omaha as my destination for the Amtrak trip?



Beth saw the darling little boy as they waited for the train to arrive. He was holding on to his mom's hand, taking in everything, not missing a thing with those big green eyes. He suddenly darted away, staring up at the huge fountain in the waiting room. She watched and listened as the young mother explained the history of it to her son.

That young woman is a born teacher.

Beth figured the little boy must be about six. She smiled at him, and he surprised her with a smile back, baby teeth white and straight. Beth started toward him. She wanted to touch and hug him, the longing overwhelming.

Where did that come from? That mother will think I am going to kidnap her child. Or is this woman losing it? Maybe I am. I'd have to be if I'm boarding a train to Omaha.



Colleen led Anna and Aaron down the aisle, jostling full backpacks on their little backs. The twins' blond hair had been carefully fixed, pigtails for Anna and a buzz for Aaron. She found their seats and efficiently found places for everything. The twins settled in a nest of pillows, blankets, and books. Colleen dropped down next to them and breathed a sigh of relief, a step taken.

Am I running away or going to Omaha to start over? Will one of those jobs come through? Will my parents let me make my own way? Or will I let them take over? What does Omaha hold for us?