

*When Love
Filled the Gap*

LaJoyce Martin

When Love
Filled the Gap

*To
my dearest Friend,
without whose Spirit I cannot live*

Contents

<i>Chapter 1</i>	– Memory’s Eddy	11
<i>Chapter 2</i>	– The Argument	19
<i>Chapter 3</i>	– The Returned Wheel	27
<i>Chapter 4</i>	– Martha’s Proposal	33
<i>Chapter 5</i>	– The Strange Dream	39
<i>Chapter 6</i>	– A New Idea	47
<i>Chapter 7</i>	– Arthur’s Arrival	53
<i>Chapter 8</i>	– Dinner with the Mayor	59
<i>Chapter 9</i>	– A Fishing Trip	65
<i>Chapter 10</i>	– The Superintendent’s Visit	71
<i>Chapter 11</i>	– Overheard Plans	77
<i>Chapter 12</i>	– Unwanted Visitor	83
<i>Chapter 13</i>	– Bridge Washout!	91
<i>Chapter 14</i>	– A Seeking Student	97
<i>Chapter 15</i>	– A Miserable Night	103
<i>Chapter 16</i>	– Miracles	109
<i>Chapter 17</i>	– A Changed Man	115
<i>Chapter 18</i>	– The Watchman’s Inquisition	121
<i>Chapter 19</i>	– Illness	127
<i>Chapter 20</i>	– A Conflicting Story	133
<i>Chapter 21</i>	– Dismissed	139
<i>Chapter 22</i>	– House Hunting	145
<i>Chapter 23</i>	– Heart Battle	151
<i>Chapter 24</i>	– The Council Meeting	157
<i>Chapter 25</i>	– Straightening Out the Facts	163

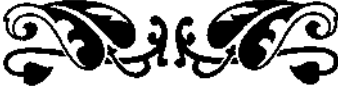
<i>Chapter 26</i> – Home for Thanksgiving	169
<i>Chapter 27</i> – A Futile Visit	175
<i>Chapter 28</i> – Nathan’s Resignation	181
<i>Chapter 29</i> – God’s Mysterious Ways	187
<i>Chapter 30</i> – Dessie’s Rainbow	193

Acknowledgments

In the darkest days of my life, God sent some special “rainbows” with words of love and encouragement. Among those to whom such acknowledgments are due are Carole Terry, Madalene Waldrep, Dolores Neely, Glenda McGuire, Sandra Myer, Glendell Pate, Grace Jinks, Nona Freeman, Jan Daniels, Lorene Berry (my mother), Cynthia Rennels, Fay Martin (my mother-in-law), Shirley Tatum, Mary Wallace, Teresa Manning, Judy Whitley, Eileen Fairchild, Jacklin McFall, Ruth Cremeans, Mary Ruth Broom, and JoAnn Berry.

And for standing behind my paltry efforts at writing, these deserve special recognition: Linda Stanley, Verba Holly, Roffie Ensey, Pauline Elms, Margie McNall, Marilyn Zedlitz, Tonnie Greer, Karen Wehrle, Elaine Fauss, Kelly Daywitt, Mary Dean, Theresa Beasley, Ruby Krenek, Paula Battrell, Barbara Whitaker (my “sales manager”), and all the dear members of our church in Morris, Oklahoma.

Chapter One



Memory's Eddy

“Good afternoon, ma’am. Is the man of the house around?”

A long shadow stretched across the sun-baked earth to the east of the tall, statuesque man with hat in hand on the short front stoop.

Never let a stranger know you live alone.

Dessie hesitated, while three-year-old Becky clung to her skirt shyly.

“I’ve lost a wagon wheel,” the gentleman hurried to explain. “The heat, I’m sure.”

Dessie’s eyes met the stranger’s, and her heart gave an abrupt leap. It had been ten years since she had looked into those mahogany eyes. There could never be a duplicate of them, but even if there could, the one deep wave in the front of his hair and the hint of a cleft in his chin would have given him away. He did not recognize her, of course; for that she was grateful.

“There’s an extra wheel in the shed out back, sir. I’m sure Walt wouldn’t mind you using it.”

When Love Filled the Gap

“Thank you, ma’am. Tell the man I’ll return it when I get mine repaired.” He was gone, taking his infinite shadow with him.

I told the truth, Dessie reasoned. I’m sure Walt wouldn’t mind *if he were alive*.

Dessie grasped the arm of the spider rocker and turned its oak back to the window, then yielded herself to its comforting support. Becky, fretting childishly, climbed onto her lap, and Dessie began to rock heedlessly.

What was Nathan Parsons doing in Limestone Gap? He had obviously traveled some distance in the searing summer heat. Was he just passing through? Something in his brunet eyes haunted her. Was it pain? bitterness? anger?

The backwash of time’s flow pulled her into the eddy of memory . . . back past last year’s tragedy to her girlhood days in the community of Brazos Point. She caught a reflection of herself, as clearly as the girl who looked in the mirror that afternoon ten years ago, dressed in her best calico dress, meticulously starched and ironed with the flat black iron. Her brother William teased her about her hair. “Gettin’ mighty vain,” he accused, bringing an unmistakable flush to her cheeks. Blushing was an error that brought more merciless ribbing.

“Mind yore own beeswax!” she retorted. She had piled her heavy bronze-colored hair atop her head in coils of curls to transform her just-turned-sixteen youthfulness to an appearance of maturity. All to impress Nathan Parsons.

“Parson Stevens got a preacher all th’ way from Loosanna fer th’ annual brush arbor meetin’,” Henry Harris reported. “Got a right fetchin’ laddy, too.”

Dessie could see Nathan now in all his pre-twenty pomp, moving about easily, his gangling six-foot-two frame almost plunging his head of black hair into the swinging coal oil lanterns. He tuned his round-hole guitar by plunking a note on the ancient piano and adjusting the wooden tuning keys on his instrument by ear until the corresponding sound pleased him. Sister Myrt, the church's antiquated musician, frowned jealously.

Then he turned and looked directly at Dessie, grinning boyishly. She was smitten! Thereafter, he took her gaze—and heart—with him wherever he went. The preacher's eloquent sermon was wasted on her.

Funny the things one remembered about such isolated incidents. The stars, for instance. She recalled the buggy ride home from church that night. One particular star left its orbit to trail a white streak across the inky sky, then disappear into black oblivion. Now that she thought of it, it seemed prophetic of that one brilliant splash of romance in her lackluster teenage life.

"Th' preacher's son asked what yore name was," William tormented. "Mayhap he's sweet on ya."

Dessie glared at him. Another mistake. "Dessie's mad an' I'm glad an' I know what t' please 'er," he chanted.

Daydreams through a sleepless night, built of wishful thinking, took her deep into breathless anticipation of a protracted meeting that would last for weeks and weeks. This spine-tingling romance would go on forever and ever. . . .

Her infatuation lasted two nights. Before the third hand-clapping, foot-stomping service, Pastor Stevens sent word to his parishoners that a wire had come from Louisiana proclaiming a dire family emergency, taking