

Lia

Running from

memories

a novel by Gary Henderson

A sample of ...

Running
from
memories

Lia

Book One

By
Gary Henderson

Young Reader's Library

RNWC Media, LLC

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Running from memories

Lia, Book 1

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Publisher's Note: This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are a product of the author's imagination.

Readers of the "Oak and the Cliff" series will enjoy some connections here.

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Dedication

To the One Who invites us to share in His creativity,
to those who love to read and love to write,
to those who love The Oak and the Cliff,
and to the one who said, “Yes.”

Thank you.

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and a little bit more...

PART THREE

Leaving

Lia lifted her head. The night was cool, still dark with stars dancing above. How long until dawn? Silence lay on the field like the dew soaking her clothes, and she pulled her cloak more tightly about her.

Nothing moved. A touch of breeze caressed her neck, and stilled.

She listened. Were there no pursuers? She could not believe the Prince would let her go as easily at that. And his son would also come searching, full of anger, even if no soldiers were sent to find her.

But then a sound, like a man walking slowly through the field. A man brushing the grass with a stick. Several men.

They came closer, slowly working their way across the field, none of them speaking, each one probing the ground as they walked.

One came directly towards her, as others passed to each side, ten paces apart. He came, and paused as he was almost over her. His stick rested on her back for a moment, ever so gently, just a touch, and then he moved on, sweeping back and forth across the ground.

As they moved out of hearing, something cold touched her hand, and a startled gasp escaped before she could help it. The tiny mole pulled back, equally surprised at the reaction.

“Oh, sweet Heaven! It’s you! I’m sorry.”

She lay her head back down, and the creature in pale grey fur came nose to nose with her. They breathed together, calming the fright. A touch of morning began lifting the black veil of night, where the forest around the clearing held up the sky.

"It's enough, I can see." She stood, shook the hair out of her face, and brushed grass from her cloak. Reton Castle behind her, the men somewhere up ahead... she turned to the left and ran to the forest, quickly disappearing among the trees.

I Will Be King

“You could not find her, or you would not? Which was it?” raged Prince Suel, and another elegant bowl of sea crystal shattered on the rough stone behind Harlan. He did not flinch, he did not blink, as it flew past. Suel had been shouting curses and abusing him since an hour after dawn, when they returned empty-handed.

One day, he thought. One day, and not too far away, if the God who loves me will permit it.

“Convince him to try harder,” snarled the Prince, shoving open the doors and stalking out.

A moment of silence. Harlan looked around at the burly men on either side.

“Shall we?” asked the Captain. Harlan sighed. They led him across to the same doors, but turned left and marched down pitted stairs into a gloomy hallway. At the end, those in front stepped aside and he ducked into a wide, low room with iron rings cemented into the stones on the opposite wall. Stripping off his leather tunic and undershirt, he stepped up to the wall and held his wrists out to be chained. Red welts crossed his back, not yet healed from a prior visit.

“Ready?” asked the Captain.

“Never, for this,” grunted Harlan. “Do your job.”

A bit of cotton yarn brushed against his shoulders. He looked down to see the red string fall softly to the floor.

“You are strong, Harlan. I shall report honestly that you endured it all with not a cry, not a sound.”

Harlan turned and lowered his arms, not yet tied to the torture rings. The men stood in a half-circle, smiling.

"Sorry," muttered the Captain, restraining a grin. "All of our best whips are in the laundry."

Harlan relaxed, and laughed, but silently — sound would carry.

"Thank you, brother," he whispered. "I will not forget. When he realizes I am gone, say that I crawled from my punishment into the forest, searching desperately for the one he seeks."

The Captain nodded. Harlan dropped to his knees, crawled a few feet, and was suddenly alone with his thoughts. Quickly dressing, he slipped quietly into his quarters, gathered what he needed, and disappeared from Reton Castle.

"They're whipping him now."

"Again, Father? How many times do you think he will endure that?"

"As many as I say." Suel stared at his son.

Ruen looked away. "Don't look at me like that, Father. I do not challenge you." Ruen stood, towering over the Prince, and moved to the broad windowsill to look out at the wide green meadows, flowers sparkling in the bright sun of a chill springtime.

"I love her, Father."

"Ha!"

"I do. I have always ..."

"She's yours," interrupted Suel. "I give her to you!" He took another bite of the barley biscuit and stared into the yellow and orange flames in the fireplace. "Yes," he continued in a whisper, "I give her to you, that will serve her well."

He turned quickly. "Do you mean it? She serves Mother. How can you give her to me?"

"I give what I want, to whom I want, whenever I want. I am the ... the Prince."

The unspoken word hung in the air. "Will you ever be King, Father?"

Suel scowled. "Time, Ruen. A little more time. The people need to forget, and they will be ready for a new king. I will be ... King." He licked his lips as he said it, and Ruen thought his father was tasting the word, savoring it. He did not understand such things.

"Will I marry her, Father?"

"Of course! As soon as we get her back, she's yours. The wretch! Running away ..."

"Why did she go, Father?"

"Why does any woman do anything?" Suel flung the biscuit into the fire. "Marissa treated her well, as well as any servant deserves to be treated. She's cold, though, be warned. She will not be the wife you imagine!"

"What do you mean, Father?"

He looked at his son for a long moment.

"Never mind, Ruen."

He could not read his father's thoughts, but he never could. He thought of Lia again, and imagined her in the deep forest. By now she must be hungry. And cold. Maybe lost.

"Will they find her?"

"They'll find her," muttered Suel. "Or Harlan will wish they had."

Yes, thought Ruen, her father will find her. He loves her. He will do whatever he has to, and find her and bring her ... back? Will he? Back here?

Ruen stared at the forest. Would Harlan bring her back? A thought formed in his mind, and he decided not to put it into words. He would bring her back himself.

Father will be proud.

A Bowl of Soup

Loisa glanced up from her furious assault on the carrots and onions destined for tonight's soup pot, and thought she saw a bit of colored cloth between two sweet gum trees at the end of the front path. She waited and watched.

Tarmed must have noticed the silence, as he pushed a needle and cord through one hole after another in the calfskin vest he wished he had finished last fall. He looked up, and Loisa glanced his way.

“Someone's there, hiding.” She looked down the path.

Tarmed returned to his needle. “Not for long. One trace of your soup's aroma drifting down the breeze to the end of the path will bring them running! Better set another plate.”

She glanced back at him and smiled. He was right. No one could resist her soup. She bent to the chopboard, and began singing a gardener's song about carrots and potatoes planted in rows, and the sun and rain bringing them up, and and the sweet smell of dinner on the table. A light, careless melody, sung just loud enough to be heard at the end of the path.

Once more she thought she saw a glimpse of red cotton, and maybe a dark brown fur pulled over a pale face. But she went about her business until the sun faded and Tarmed came with a hungry look squinting at the soup pot.

“Supper's on!” she called, standing at the window, a bit louder than needed. “We have plenty!” Turning to the open window, she leaned on the sill. “Sure wish we had someone to eat with us,

Tarmed, or my name's not Loisa Summerwood!"

Turning back into the room, she carried the pot to the table, and noisily dished it into three bowls. Tarmed looked up at her from his place at the end of the table, smiling.

"Wonder if we'll have time to speak our thanks before they knock on the..."

Knock, knock. Twice, softly.

"I'll go." Tarmed stood, picked up a stout cane, and strode to the door. Cane in the right hand, he pulled the door open with his left, and stared. Loisa came up behind him. "Who is..."

Lia stood shivering in the early dusk, clothes torn by brambles and soiled from several falls. Her hair was brushed back, but as with a hand, not a proper brush. She bled from a scrape on the temple. Loisa rushed past Tarmed and gathered her into her arms. Standing there, being held, with the fragrance of potato soup wrapping around her, Lia began to cry.

In minutes she was in fresh clothes, hair combed, wounds cleaned and oiled, and a spoon in her hand. She looked around the room, and at her hosts, but said nothing as she ate eagerly.

"I may need to go back to the window and un-invite all those others that may have heard me!" laughed Loisa. "We'll have naught to offer them by the time they get seated!"

Lia flushed, and put down her spoon. She looked down, still not speaking.

"Oh, darling, I was just a-teasing! You gather up that spoon and do your business. Serious, now, you keep going with that soup!"

Lia looked up and studied her face for a moment, then picked up the spoon and began eating again, more slowly.

"You're most welcome here, young lady, for as long as you need," said Tarmed. We'd be interested to know who you are, of course."

"When you've eaten your fill," he quickly added.

Lia set the spoon down, the bowl empty for the second time.

“Thank you,” she said quietly, looking at them each in turn. “I had not eaten since yesterday noon.”

“And come a long way in a hurry, it would seem.”

She nodded. “I’d best go now.”

“What?” they both exclaimed. “I think not!” said Loisa. “A hot tub is about to be ready, and a good night’s sleep on a fine, soft mattress that several geese paid dearly for!”

“But... they’re looking for me. I can’t stay!”

Loisa looked at Tarmed with a question in her eyes.

“I think,” he mused, “the bed behind that oak door will be the safest, warmest place in five days’ walk. And if anyone comes, I’ll tell them my daughter’s in the tub, and I’ll beat their heads into oatmeal before I let anyone disturb her!”

Lia visibly relaxed. “Thank you, sir, you are far more than kind, and it will be repaid... if that be possible.” She rose, and braced herself on the table.

“You are exhausted. Come.” Loisa led her into the next room, closing the door behind them and leaving Tarmed in charge of the front door and any who might choose to enter it.

“Hmm,” Tarmed said to himself. “Hmm, hmm, hmm.”

She’s alone. Frightened. Fleeing something.

Good clothes, not traveling clothes.

Very good clothes, he thought, picking up the head wrap left on the chair. Not farming or shopkeeper cloth. Castle cloth.

Hmm.

He moved to the bedroom door, and listened. The sounds of a young woman sobbing, and his wife comforting her.

Tarmed went to the front door, opened it just enough to slip out, letting no more light spill out into the early evening than necessary. He stepped to the side of the door, motionless against the outside wall, and waited.

Nothing moved that he could see or hear. Scurryings in the

woods, but no more than any summer night would bring. His eyes slowly adjusted, and he could see by the starlight all he needed to see. Moving across the yard and into the woods, he drifted along parallel to the path in the direction by which she must have come, watching, listening.

No one pursued her. Yet.

Returning to the house, he brought blankets and an axe out, and made a bed in the corner of the low stone wall that circled the yard. From there he could see anyone who approached, and not be seen until he wanted to be.

Let them come.

A bit later in the story ...

There was a moment of absolute stillness, when a bird chirping a mile away would have been heard by everyone present. Lia spoke, as loud as her trembling voice would allow.

“I have seen the King.”

The Councilman stared down and found her face. She pushed back her hood and met his gaze.

“Lia! It’s you! Welcome back, we have missed you.”

He looked out over the crowd, and opened his arms wide to include them all. “We have all seen the King! We all have! But now he’s gone, rest his soul, and we need to move on.”

Uneasy shuffling and talk welled up behind her, and quickly silence prevailed again.

She spoke again, louder.

“I bring a message from the King.”

The crowd erupted in cheers and questions. A message? From the King? He’s alive? Where is he? When will he return?

Suel stood.

“A message from our beloved King? Can it be true?”

Lia nodded at him.

“Quickly come up here and tell us all, please, and welcome home!”

She moved slowly towards the nearest steps, and watched Suel move slowly to the nearest guard and speak privately to him. They both watched her come. Tarmed moved in close behind her, keeping one hand on her shoulder.

She reached the steps, and guards moved to separate them. She stopped, and waited, looking at them.

The crowd began calling, “What did he say? What is the message from the King?”

“Come on up,” said the taller guard, moving to reach around her and pull her away from Tarmed. She looked back at Tarmed, and he moved closer, his face inches from the guard’s face and his arm across Lia’ shoulders, holding her tightly to him.

“They’re waiting,” she said quietly to the guard. He looked across at his partner, then moved back and allowed both to climb the steps.

She reached the top and stopped. The Prince waited for her to come to him, but instead she stood on the front edge of the stage and turned towards the crowd.

“I have a gift for you, from the King!”

They roared, and she unwrapped the bundle held close within her cloak. She held it up.

“This was in his chest.”

They stared. A long arrow, a hunter’s arrow, with hunting blades still intact. The colors were red and gold, with a purple marker.

“Suel’s colors! And no one else!” A single voice shouted it.

The End of this Sample.

Enjoy the story!

Lia

Running from memories

by Gary Henderson

**When Lia and her father
sailed away to find a new life,
a storm blew them to an
unexpected new home.**

**Then a second time, Lia
found herself on the water,
hunted and afraid, running
from memories, seeking a
new start.**

**But it was the third time when
the waves finally carried her
to the home she could not have
dreamed was waiting for her.**

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