

The cover features several light gray raindrops scattered across the white background, some above and some below the title.

the
sound
of
rain

SARAH LOUDIN THOMAS



BETHANYHOUSE
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Sarah Loudin Thomas, *The Sound of Rain*
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2017. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2017 by Sarah Loudin Thomas

Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017945769

ISBN 978-0-7642-1961-0 (trade paper)

ISBN 978-0-7642-3118-6 (cloth)

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations identified NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, incidents, and dialogues are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Cover design by Kathleen Lynch/Black Kat Design

Author is represented by Books & Such Literary Agency.

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Sarah Loudin Thomas, *The Sound of Rain*
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2017. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

For the men who inspired Judd Markley:

Daniel Loudin—brother, woodsman, mountain man

Uncle Judd Loudin—hero of my father's tales

Uncle Harry Markley—coal miner who lived to tell
what it felt like to be buried inside a mountain



*To the roots of the mountains I sank down;
the earth beneath barred me in forever.*

Jonah 2:6 NIV

CHAPTER

1

BETHEL, WEST VIRGINIA

APRIL 1954

Judd wanted to take a deep breath more than anything. But the weight on his chest, combined with the dust-laden air, made it impossible. He closed his eyes and opened them again, finding it made no difference. Either he was blind or the cave-in had erased any hint of light. He coughed and spit.

Darkness pressed against him almost as hard as the silence. There should have been the hum of machinery, the clink of pickaxes against coal, men's voices. He moved his hands and felt relief at the sensation of ten fingers brushing against rough stone. He couldn't move much, but at least he knew he was alive.

Continuing to take stock, he found he couldn't move anything below his waist. That must be the weight of the rock and maybe some timbers. Surely his legs and feet were still there. And nothing hurt too terrible—that was good. He shifted his head and realized there was a boot pressed against his cheek. It scared him so bad he cussed. Then he felt awful—that might be Harry's foot. Not Joe's, though—he'd been working that

other, narrower seam. He hoped Harry and Joe had time to start out toward the entrance.

Judd found he could breathe a little easier—the dust must have settled. He wished he could reach up and wipe the grit from his lips. He spit again and tried to settle his mind to wait. He'd never been afraid of tight spaces, and maybe it was good he couldn't see to know how bad his situation was. And yet . . . the darkness had become a tangible thing. He could almost feel it brushing across his skin. Fear welled in him, and he gritted his teeth against it. There was nothing he could do, no one he could call out to. He guessed Ma would tell him to pray, but he was a man of action and it wasn't like God would reach down into the bowels of the earth and pluck him out. He exhaled through pursed lips just to hear the sound of air moving and maybe, just maybe, there were words buried in that breath.

After what seemed like an eternity, Judd heard a sound. Or thought he did. It might just be his ears wanting to hear something. A few minutes later, he heard a voice for sure and certain and saw a chink of light. His very being quivered, the sudden burst of hope almost more than he could bear. It took at least another hour before the men got to him, their lanterns flashing against the debris and hurting his light-starved eyes.

“Don't move, Judd, we've gotta get this beam off before we can dig you out.”

“Ain't goin' nowhere,” he said.

Martin Burr grunted as he shifted some more rock. “Reckon you ain't.”

Finally, Judd felt the weight on his chest ease. He took a good breath and thought maybe he did hurt some. He saw Martin's grim face. The older man flinched and told Judd to brace himself. Pain seared his very soul, and Judd didn't know anything more.



When he woke, Judd's first thought was that he was still trapped in the mine. But the astringent smell and the squeak of a nurse's shoes in the hall let him know he was in a hospital. He glanced to his right and saw a curtain drawn across a window. The room was barely lit—must be nighttime. To his left, he could see the shape of another man in another bed. He hoped it was Joe.

Judd took that deep breath he'd been wanting back in the mine and moaned. He'd broken some ribs, sure as shootin'. Once the pain eased, he began to inventory his condition. Both hands worked fine. He reached up to rub the sleep from his eyes and found his right shoulder to be stiff but workable. He felt along his torso until he came to the bandages around his rib cage. Next he wiggled his toes—the left foot seemed fine, but his right leg appeared to be suspended some way—immobile. He was afraid to move around much, tender as his ribs were, but at least all his limbs were attached. That was something.

Footsteps approached, and a nurse stepped inside the room.

“Mr. Markley. You're awake.”

“Yes, ma'am. And I'm powerful thirsty.”

“I'm not surprised—you've been here most of three days now.” She slipped over to the side of the bed and held a cup with a straw to his lips. The water slipped over his tongue like the first drink after a day spent in the hayfield. He guessed maybe he hadn't died after all.

“How are you feeling?”

“With my hands.” Judd grinned and felt his dry lips crack. He licked them. “Guess I feel pretty good for a dead man.”

The nurse smiled. “You're actually quite lucky, Mr. Markley. The doctors thought they'd have to take off that leg, but it looks like you'll get to keep it a little longer.”

Judd tried to feel lucky, but found it beyond him at the moment. A sound came from the other bed, and he looked over to see Harry leaning over the bed rail.

“Well if you ain’t a sight for sore eyes. I was afeared we lost you.”

“Not this time around,” Judd said. “You must not be hurt too bad, sitting up there all lively like that.”

Harry gave the nurse an appreciative look. “These gals would just about make a dead man sit up and take notice.”

The nurse made a harrumphing sound but didn’t seem displeased. “I’m going to leave you boys to catch up. Breakfast will be around shortly.”

Harry swung his legs over the side of his bed and squinted at Judd. “You’re lucky to be alive, son. I was farther out than you and just got knocked around a little, but I thought you was a goner for sure.”

“What about Joe?”

Harry blinked once. “Aww, they patched him up and sent him home. He’ll be back at it afore the week’s out.”

“Say, whose foot was pressed up against my face then? If it wasn’t you, then who the heck was it?”

Harry ducked his head. “Judd. That was your foot. That’s how come your leg’s all wrapped up like that. You’ve got enough steel in there to shoe a couple of horses.”

Judd reached down and realized the heavy cast came clear up to his waist. “Am I gonna walk again?”

“Don’t see why not. Seems like they wouldn’t have gone to all that trouble to give you a dead weight to drag around.”

Judd rolled his head against the pillow, remembering the rough scrape of the boot against his cheek. His boot. He was beginning to feel pain all over—in his rib cage, his hips, his back. Seemed like everything but the hair on his head was starting to hurt.

“Son, you don’t look so good. I’m gonna get that nurse back in here.”

Judd thought to accuse his friend of calling the nurse back so he could get another look at her, but he didn’t have the grit

to make a joke. He nodded and closed his eyes, grateful that even then, light filtered through his eyelids.



The nurse must've given him something to make him sleep. When Judd woke the second time, the first thing he realized was that he felt about half-starved. 'Course, he also felt like he'd been in a tussle with a freight train and lost, but he decided to focus on hungry. You couldn't eat if you were dead, and in the dark of the mine he'd thought he might be dead for longer than he liked to remember.

He pried his eyes open and found Harry sitting beside his bed, staring at him. There was also a tray on a table with a bowl of something that might've been hot once.

"That stuff fit to eat?" he asked.

Harry swallowed convulsively and pushed the bowl toward him. "I et mine and it didn't do me no harm. You need help spooning it up?"

Judd braced himself and pushed up a notch, grimacing as pain shot through him in so many places he couldn't narrow it down to say what hurt. "If I do, I'll ask that good-looking nurse."

He reached for the spoon and tasted some kind of bean soup. It was barely warm, but he swallowed it down and wished for a piece of corn bread and maybe a glass of cool buttermilk. His throat still felt raw and parched from the coal dust. Harry sat and watched like a hound dog hoping for a crumb.

"Harry, I appreciate your concern, but you're crowding me a mite. You want some soup?"

Harry ducked his head and shifted in his chair. "I've got something to tell ya. I been waiting for you to wake up and eat—wanted you to get what rest you could."

Judd swallowed and left his spoon, which was getting downright heavy, in the half-empty bowl. "Spit her out, then."

“It’s Joe. I lied about him being alright.” Harry fisted his hands on his knees. “Them nurses said you needed time to heal afore I told you, but I don’t hold with lying and it’s been weighing on me.” He lifted his head to meet Judd’s eyes. “Joe didn’t make it. Looks like he died straight out—got hit in the head and probably didn’t know nothing about it.” Harry’s Adam’s apple bobbed and he lowered his eyes again. “I know you was real close to your brother, I couldn’t see keeping it from you.”

Judd felt like the weight of the mountain was centered on his chest once again. He fought for air as surely as he had in the dark of the mine. Not Joe. Not his baby brother who’d always had dreams enough for both of them. He should have died; he should have found Joe and taken his place. He closed his eyes and focused on the pain in his ribs, his leg, his head—anything but the pain in his heart.