

Classic Collection 6

Linger Dreams

NORMA JEAN LUTZ

Norma Jean Lutz Classic Collection – Book #6

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All of the characters in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

A note from the author:

I love to hear from my readers. You may contact me here:

NormaJean@BeANovelist.com
www.CleanTeenReads.net

This book is dedicated to:

My long-time friend and writing cohort, Judith (Judy) Keefe. An exceptional editor, an eagle-eye proofreader, and a darned good writer (as well as many other stellar talents). Our paths have intertwined and intersected many times, in many ways, and in many different seasons. Here we are, still fast friends. You are valued and appreciated.

[Judy is the author of the book, *Kinkept*. *KinKept* seeks to raise consciousness about KinKeeping—those things we can do purposefully to help “keep the kin together.”]

A Word about the *Norma Jean Lutz Classic Collection*

During my writing career, I've been privileged to have over 50 titles published under my name. Due to the nature of the publishing world in days past, most of these titles were off the shelves and out of print in a short period of time. Sad but true.

Now, a new day has dawned in the word of publishing. Digital publishing has created the opportunity for my past titles to be reintroduced to a whole new generation of readers.

These stories are timeless in spite of the fact they were penned several decades ago. Hence, I have chosen to call them the ***Norma Jean Lutz Classic Collection***.

Lingering Dreams is Book #6 in the Classic Collection series.

I'm excited to be able to bring these stories out of the files and into your hands. I hope you enjoy your read.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Norma Jean Lutz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'N' and a long, sweeping underline.

Chapter 1

"Blasted rain," Kirsten muttered under her breath. "Why now?"

She carefully steered her father's mud-splattered Jeep around water-filled chug holes in the long, muddy driveway of the Nicholson Ranch. September rains could be a nuisance and yet they were a respite from the hot, dry, dusty Oklahoma summer.

"And why should I be the one who has to go get this kid? What do you think, Trinket? Not fair. Right?"

Kirsten's beloved cocker spaniel, sitting in the seat beside her, gave a whine in response.

"I knew you'd agree."

As she pulled out onto the main road, heading into Clemetsville, she realized she was humming the tune again. The one that had come to her that morning as she got ready for school. Quickly, she'd grabbed her guitar and picked out the melody. It surprised her that a song so fresh and new could stick so stubbornly in her head.

All through the day at school, the song had teased her and she alternately gazed out the classroom window and then scribbled lyrics in the back of her notebook.

Riding home from school on the torturous bus, bumping over rutted backroads, she continued formulating the lyrics in her mind until her friend, Myra, grabbed her arm.

"Kirsten Nicholson, will you please wake up? I'm sick of sitting here talking to myself." Myra's bright blue eyes flashed her irritation.

"I'm awake. Honest. You were talking about the rodeo, right?"

It wasn't hard to guess since her friend ate and slept rodeos.

"Not just *any* rodeo," Myra scolded, "the Wanoka County Rodeo. The competition's hotter than ever this year."

Every inch of Myra's five-foot frame was geared for tough competition.

"You know," she went on, "I thought since Dan was away, you and I might have a closer friendship. Your heart must have followed him to Oklahoma City, because you sure aren't here."

It was true. None of the upcoming activities for her senior year at Clemetsville High meant anything to her since Dan left for farrier school. Her life had revolved around Dan Mallory for three years, and now he was gone.

But Myra was wrong about what captured her attention on the bus. It wasn't Dan, it was that haunting song. She wished she could tell Myra about it, but her songwriting was private. Too fragile to share with anyone. Like a shimmering drifting soap bubble—if anyone touched it, it would surely burst and disappear.

Trinket didn't count. The cocker had already heard the song several times. She and Trinket shared a number of secrets.

As Kristen pulled to a slow stop at one of Clemetsville's three stop lights on Main Street, she reached over to pet the cocker's honey-golden coat. "Crazy, isn't it, Trinket? I guess all those dreams I had in junior high of writing songs and becoming a recording artist were just little-kid pipe dreams."

Pulling out from the stoplight, she continued her rambling. "I mean, let's get real, okay? The music industry's a rat-race. A greenhorn like me would get trampled underfoot." She sighed and Trinket gave another whine. The dog seemed to sense her every emotion.

"Oh, it's okay, Trinket. Really it is. I mean when Dan and I are married, I'll give guitar lessons to the kids in town. I won't ever desert my talents." She stroked Trinket's head again. "I promise."

At the next light, she turned down the side street to the bus depot. A glance at her watch confirmed that she was late. "That kid's probably in a frenzy by now. But it's not my fault, is it girl. If I'd known earlier that it was my job to come and get him, I would have cleaned up."

She hated coming into town in her dirty Levi's and muddy boots, but there'd been no time to change.

She'd been in her room after school writing a letter to Dan when she was called to the barn to help feed calves. Her father, along with their hired hand, Loopy Worsham, had had to ride down to Split Log Canyon to see about a calving heifer who was in trouble.

She'd no more got started feeding when her mom came out to the barn and said, "I'll take over here, Kirsten. You take the Jeep and go pick up that boy Wendell is sending."

Selma Nicholson didn't seem too enthused about "that boy."

"You'll have to leave right now," she added. "The roads are muddy and you'll have to drive slow."

Her father always said if a heifer had trouble with her first calf, it would be raining, snowing, or in the dead of night. The saying held true today since it was raining buckets. If it hadn't been for the distressed cow, her father would be driving to Clemetsville to greet the foster son of his brother, Wendell.

As it was, Kirsten's half-finished letter, along with her half-finished song, was left hanging in a state of suspended animation in her cozy upstairs bedroom. She was quite anxious to return to both.

Trinket whimpered as Kirsten pulled into a parking spot outside the bus depot. Kirsten knew the dog wanted to come in. "Sorry, girl. You'll have to stay out here." Kirsten told her. "I'll only be a minute."

At that, the obedient cocker curled up in the seat to wait. Kirsten smiled. She had to disagree with her father's opinion that Trinket was worthless simply because she wasn't a trained ranch dog like their sheltie, Commodore. Surely there were other requirements for being a valuable dog besides the ability to round up cattle and cut out calves for branding.

In the driving rain, the brown-brick bus depot looked more dismal than ever. From her Levi's pocket, Kirsten pulled out a small piece of paper. "Enrique Delaire,"

she read the name aloud and then shook her head. "Whatever got into Uncle Wendell? Sending his foster son to us now?"

In his most recent letter, her uncle had written: "I figure you're shorthanded on the ranch now that Dan's gone off to farrier school. I think Enrique's going to work out just fine for you. He can use the short-term work. Will send him by bus next Friday. He has dark hair and eyes. You can't miss him."

Kirsten secured her Stetson and prepared to make a beeline for the door through the rain. As she did, she nearly collided with a woman coming out, having to zig-zag to keep from being plowed down.

As she stepped inside, greasy food aromas rushed at her from the adjacent diner. She pulled off her hat and made a shower as she shook off droplets. She saw two ladies, a young one holding a child, and an older one with gray hair. By the windows were clustered three elderly men who were locals who'd just come in to get out of the rain. They were deep in animated conversation.

No boy.

Perhaps he ran away, she reasoned. After all, the kids Uncle Wendell and Aunt Muriel took in at their home in Albuquerque were usually runaways. Young Enrique probably didn't want to work on a ranch.

Kirsten shifted her weight from one foot to the other. *Can't miss him*, right, Uncle Wendell?

After standing there wondering what to do, she stepped over to the ticket counter and asked the girl sitting there, "Excuse me, has the bus from Albuquerque come in?"

The round-faced girl barely glanced up from the magazine she was reading. "Fifteen minutes ago," she said into the magazine.

Kirsten paused. She knew most every person in this small burg, but this girl was new. "Did a dark-haired boy get off?" Kirsten had no idea how old. "About twelve or thirteen years old?" she added.

The girl took a large bite of candy bar, looked up at Kirsten, then jerked her head in the direction of the diner. "Probably in there," and went back to her reading.

Now more than ever, Kirsten wished she were back in her room finishing the letter to Dan. At the door of the small diner she studied the people in the booths and at the counter. She felt silly and out of place.

Then she saw him. There in the back booth. A thin, frail boy eating French fries. That *had* to be him.

Taking a breath, Kirsten walked in his direction. His hair wasn't really dark—more of a light brown. But what do men know about hair color? He was dressed in a worn, long-sleeved knit shirt and faded jeans.

She slowed her step as she approached, but he didn't look up. He seemed to be in another world staring out the window at the rain and munching his fries. Why wasn't he frantically looking about for someone to fetch him? she wondered. If only Uncle Wendell had been more specific.

Rain continued to pelt the plate-glass window and the boy stared at the silvery sheets coating the pane. "Enrique?" she asked softly. He remained motionless.

She took another breath and stepped nearer. The diner was nearly empty, but she didn't want to attract attention. "Enrique?" she asked again. Still he stared at the rain. It was obvious—this kid really didn't want to be here. Perhaps they could feed him supper, give him a place to sleep, and ship him back to Albuquerque tomorrow.

She thought of muscular Dan loading hay bales, or roping calves for branding. This boy would be sadly out of place at the Nicholson Ranch.

She moved to touch his shoulder. He jumped, then looked up at her with large, sad eyes. "Enrique?" she asked. "I'm Kirsten. Kirsten Nicholson."

The boy's face screwed up in puzzlement. He studied her intently. Now what was she supposed to do? Bodily drag him through the rain to the Jeep?

"Let's go now, Enrique," she urged. "My parents are waiting. It'll be suppertime before we get back."

He scooted closer to the window, his face now fearful.

Kirsten stepped back, confused. She guessed she could call home and ask what she should do. But her mom was probably still at the barn. And what if the boy should run off while she was using the pay phone? Maybe she could ask a waitress to keep an eye on him.

She turned abruptly and failed to see the young man coming toward her at a fast clip. Clumsily, and with full force, she ran smack into him. People in the nearby booth snickered. Her face burned hot with embarrassment as she looked up into a pair of laughing black eyes and a handsome bronzed face. Since she was taller than average, she was unaccustomed to looking up at boys her age.

"I'm so sorry," she managed to mumble. "I didn't see you coming."

The young man took her arm. "No, no. Please. It was all my fault," he insisted. "I was moving too fast to stop. I saw you talking to Davy here and wondered if you knew him."

"Davy?"

"I guess you *don't* know him or you would have known he can't hear you. He's deaf."

In a flash, the young man gracefully communicated to the boy using sign language. The boy gave a vague smile and nodded.

"I met him on the bus," the young man continued. "Says he's running away."

"On the bus? You came in on the bus?"

"Yes, from Albuquerque. My name's Enrique Delaire."

For the rest of Kirsten's story

[Click HERE](#)

