

A woman with long dark hair, seen from behind, stands on a path in a misty, autumnal forest. She is wearing a bright red coat. The path is covered with fallen leaves, and the trees are bare and shrouded in a light blue mist. The overall mood is mysterious and somber.

# FAITH AMONG FRIENDS

FIVE FRIENDS REUNITE TO  
REVEAL BETRAYALS AND SECRETS  
OF A SHARED PAST

VERA JANE  
COOK

## Faith Among Friends

For Bert

Copyright © 2025 by Vera Jane Cook  
Published by Indies United Publishing House, LLC

First Printing: March 2025

Edited by Jayne Sullivan

All rights reserved worldwide. No part of this publication may be replicated, redistributed, or given away in any form without the prior written consent of the author/publisher or the terms relayed to you herein. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author. The only exception is by a reviewer, who may quote short excerpts in a review.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Cover Art by David Prendergast

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN:978-1-64456-803-3 [Paperback]

ISBN: 978-1-64456-804-0 [Kindle]

ISBN: 978-1-64456-805-7 [ePub]

Library of Congress Control Number:



INDIES UNITED PUBLISHING HOUSE, LLC  
P.O. BOX 3071  
QUINCY, IL 62305-3071  
INDIESUNITED.NET

FAITH  
AMONG  
FRIENDS

A NOVEL

VERA JANE COOK



INDIES UNITED PUBLISHING HOUSE, LLC

# Table of Contents

Chapter One.....	9
Chapter Two.....	16
Chapter Three.....	22
Chapter Four.....	27
Chapter Five.....	33
Chapter Six.....	36
Chapter Seven.....	42
Chapter Eight.....	46
Chapter Nine.....	54
Chapter Ten.....	60
Chapter Eleven.....	68
Chapter Twelve.....	83
Chapter Thirteen.....	90
Chapter Fourteen.....	94
Chapter Fifteen.....	97
Chapter Sixteen.....	103
Chapter Seventeen.....	113
Chapter Eighteen.....	118
Chapter Nineteen.....	123
Chapter Twenty.....	130
Chapter Twenty-One.....	137
Chapter Twenty-Two.....	142
Chapter Twenty-Three.....	150
Chapter Twenty-Four.....	158
Chapter Twenty-Five.....	163
Chapter Twenty-Six.....	166
Chapter Twenty-Seven.....	171
Chapter Twenty-Eight.....	181
Chapter Twenty-Nine.....	186
Chapter Thirty.....	190
Chapter Thirty-One.....	193
Chapter Thirty-Two.....	197
Chapter Thirty-Three.....	199
Chapter Thirty-Four.....	206
Chapter Thirty-Five.....	213
Chapter Thirty-Six.....	226
Chapter Thirty-Seven.....	230
Chapter Thirty-Eight.....	238
Chapter Thirty-Nine.....	242
Chapter Forty.....	244

Chapter Forty-One.....	254
Chapter Forty-Two.....	258
Chapter Forty-Three.....	261
May 2008.....	265
Chapter Forty-Four.....	266
Chapter Forty-Five.....	277
Chapter Forty-Six.....	284
Chapter Forty-Seven.....	294
Chapter Forty-Eight.....	301
Chapter Forty-Nine.....	310
Chapter Fifty.....	319
Chapter Fifty-One.....	331
Chapter Fifty-Two.....	336
Chapter Fifty-Three.....	344
Chapter Fifty-Four.....	348
Chapter Fifty-Five.....	352
Chapter Fifty-Six.....	356
 <i>Also By Vera Jane Cook.....</i>	 360

# Part I



# Chapter One

## VIVIAN

*Early June 2006*

Like an old, frayed leather album of glossy Kodak photos, their faces flipped past her vision, turned over in her mind like words out of sequence – their laughter caught by the blink of a shutter – their sorrows remembered like some vague recollection of a movie that had been so mysteriously compelling, *La Strada*, perhaps; brilliant images standing out against the loss of full sentences.

*Has it really been so many years? Years that have passed like breaths, too necessary to notice?*

She hadn't planned it, certainly never would have consciously planned it like this – seventeen years to the day since that *seemingly* fatal afternoon. She'd realized the coincidence as she sat listening to the banal drone of a dial tone, hoping Susie wouldn't pick up.

"Lucky day," Vivian uttered after hearing Susie's perky attempt at humor: *Here's the beep. You know what to do. Same old same old ... So do it now and do it quickly.*

Vivian was relieved. She hadn't wanted to take Susie by surprise and startle her into an abrupt refusal. She'd rely on low impact shock therapy; a few tidbits to whet the appetite but not too much information.

"Hi, it's me, a voice from the past." She coughed, certain her nervousness would barely be noticeable. "It's Vivian

Forrester. My God, it's been years. I'd love for us to get together, with the others, the rest of the feisty five, wouldn't that be a blast? I've got the time and place. Call me, soon as you can."

One down and three to go; Vivian clicked the phone off quickly. *Seventeen years to the day*. She wondered if they'd make the connection and find the coincidence macabre, in poor taste. But she highly doubted they'd make any connection to Faith at all. She was the only one of them to carry the weight of it around like a third leg, like something obnoxiously and pathetically freakish.

Vivian had brought it all on herself, truth be told. The choices she made back then could not be undone; the knot was tied and tightened. She was reacting the way she always reacted: she turned the other cheek and said, *And it will go away. If I ignore it, maybe it isn't so, never was so*. But just recently her blatant omission had become too fragile, too close to blowing up in her face. Faith wanted to meet her biological mother. *Oh, shit*.

Vivian reached for the phone. Funny how she hadn't spoken to Ned in years either but being so damn anal, she had transferred all her old phone numbers and there they had remained, after all these years. On speed dial, no less.

"Vivian! God, it's been a millennium. How are you?"

"Fine, just great." She let out a nervous laugh. "I'm calling a meeting of the old tribunal, the feisty five. Wouldn't it be fabulous for all of us to get together after all this time? You know, catch up?"

"Oh? Well, that might be difficult for me right now, Vivian. Not sure if I can make any plans. I've got a lot on my plate these days. My wife is ... not well."

"Sorry to hear. Look, it's about Faith, my niece, Faith," she said, carefully articulating. "There's an incompleteness in all our lives and I need to set it straight."

He paused too long.

“Faith? The girl who drowned? Your niece? What incompleteness?”

“Will you come?” she asked. “I owe you all an explanation. I’ll explain what happened when I see you. I should have explained it to you years ago but you know ... life got in the way.”

“I’m confused.”

“Yes, it is confusing, *was* confusing.”

“I’m awfully busy, Vivian.”

“It’s important.”

“For you or for me?”

“Does it matter?”

“That’s what you said about the last reunion, that it was important. Well, it was a disaster.”

“I’d really like for us all to get together. I need to tell you what really happened seventeen years ago and why I couldn’t tell you what really happened seventeen years ago.”

“That’s very convoluted.”

“Yes, I know.”

“I’m listening.”

“I need to do this in person.”

“Why?”

“Because we’ve carried the weight of this for too long. I certainly have.”

“What weight?”

“Faith.”

“You’re not making sense.”

“Look, will you come to the reunion? It will all be explained.”

“When are you planning this get together?”

“Saturday after next.”

“Are the others coming?”

“Well, I’m counting on that.”

“Perhaps I can work it out. It will be fun to see everyone ... I imagine.”

“Yes, it will be.”

“I’ll try to make it,” he said, a polite afterthought.

*Well, at least he said that,* Vivian mused to herself.

“Where are we meeting?” Ned asked. “I’ll get a pen.”

“No need. The White Horse Tavern, 1:00 P.M.”

He reacted just as she thought he would. She heard the nostalgia in his tone.

“Oh, perfect spot. Just like old times, Vivian. Are we going to recapture our lost youth?”

“I’m counting on you,” Vivian said before hanging up. Of course, she’d call him three days before and then two days and then the day of. She’d probably have to call Susie back a hundred times too, but she’d get her to show up. The difficult ones would be Kit, of course, and David.

She’d mention Faith each time. She wouldn’t harp on it; she’d just mention it. *What more was there to say about Faith’s drowning after all these years? The poor girl is dead, leave it be.* But they would agree to come after much pleading; their curiosity piqued, though their displeasure would be obvious, feigned or otherwise.

Vivian was looking forward to seeing them all again, even though she’d probably have to sit through hints of Susie’s disappointing third marriage in the affected silences of her unfinished sentences; perhaps an unfair assumption but nonetheless a good guess; she was sure. Then, of course, she would get the scoop on the surprisingly successful maneuvers in business that had gained Ned a Mercedes and an apartment on Park Avenue, a lifestyle that had once been termed a “plastic prison” and had made them all threaten to puke. She’d read an article about Ned in *The New York Times* real estate section about a year after their last reunion, he’d turned out to be quite a mogul.

Time changes all things once young. She too, had settled for a much easier ambition than chasing an elusive and unpredictable career in the theater. Yes, certainly, time had carried them all away, scattered them off into lives

preoccupied by dramas with a great deal less turmoil than the old obsessions that had once filled their fantasies, their dreams of impressions in cement on the Walk of Fame. Except, of course, for Kit, the only one among them who'd remained, eyes fixed on the golden ring.

Old friends should not be reminders of how much we bullshit ourselves, but they so often are – oh, the distances between procrastinations – history's rewrites. Vivian wanted to be honest when it came to her old friends. It was her last chance for honesty, to save face in front of Faith. She was doing it all for Faith, coming clean at this reunion. But was honesty really the objective wasn't it more about saving her relationship with her niece? Wasn't it more about not wanting to look bad, even now, so many years later?

So much had changed. Vivian wasn't competing with anyone anymore; the old competitive edges had softened and dissolved with age. Remembering all the subtle psychological tugs of war between them made Vivian smile, especially since she had grown past the age of competition, preferring instead to be known as a doting mentor. It's what happens to older women, they become motherly, no longer fiery youthful competitors on the battleground of ambition and men. It is so much better after fifty – so much less intense. Competing with one's peers had been so damn exhausting.

"I have a theory about competition," she used to tell them. "It begins in grade school, perhaps sooner, and then, it's accelerated by society's preoccupation with success ... and the vacuous commercialism to be beautiful, commercially beautiful, of course. Yes, actually ... it becomes an obsession to be a winner ... or not to be a loser, or not to be a character actress stuck in ugly sibling roles. It winds up making us all neurotic."

Vivian's youthful friendships had been characteristically ambivalent, as all relationships are, she supposed. But she'd been so fond of each of them. She never experienced that

again, those bonds, those passionate declarations of love and loyalty. And they all had been intensely loyal to each other in the old days, at least on the surface. Under the surface was a different story. Back then the heart was always up for grabs. Phone buddies were offered in all the midnight hours, there were tissues for tears shed and hugs for all the hurts and disappointing rejections received from one too many myopic casting directors. Between them, the heart was a prism of shifting vulnerabilities taking solace in the crook of Susie's shoulder, or Kit's or David's or Ned's. They had been so close, even though they held bits and pieces of themselves behind walls of glass, precarious wounds that they shielded from each other ... possibly even from themselves.

One must age in order to realize that once bonds are made, memories churn throughout a lifetime. Things you thought you'd forgotten show up unexpectedly. Youth is a haunting, a tenacious ghost. Vivian had often asked herself if the scars would have healed any sooner had it not been for that wretched weekend long ago, the weekend of Faith's so-called drowning when they had each scattered indifferently back into their own lives, without the truth. Perhaps a betrayal among friends lingers forever ... left to scar the future. Certainly, it scarred Vivian's. She was a coward. No, she was worse, she was hiding behind walls much thicker than mere denial because she was dishonest. She was painfully aware of her stupidity and her coming-back-to-haunt-her mistakes.

Vivian's absurd deceit had clearly scattered them apart with all the fury of a storm intent on separating the earth from its axis. She had hoped to mend the past that last reunion weekend, instead, she had only compounded the confusion ... dug a deeper hole ... and shattered any possibility for reconnections, at least not in the short term. It's no wonder they never spoke to each other again. Why in god's name would they want to speak to each other now?

Leave it to the feisty five, as they called themselves in the early days, not to escape their youth unscathed, not to bleed a little blood, not to fuck up because fucking up was the luxury they were entitled to. They shattered their illusions about life and blamed each other. For what? Who knew?

“Betrayal alters the way in which the world is perceived,” Vivian used to say. “It kills hope. So don’t betray your friends.”

But they didn’t listen. They did betray each other, and their frailties left the startling shadows of ungodly cruelty trailing behind like baggage carried from childhood, refusing to exit the psyche gently. And so, they suffered ... the downside of being young, there is no warning that life is too often a blow to the ego.

**Also By Vera Jane Cook**

The Darlings

A Saffron Sun

The Fourniers: When Hannah Played Ragtime

The Fourniers: Glamor Girl

The Fourniers: The Memory of Music

Pleasant Day

Lies a River Deep

Marybeth, Hollister & Jane

Where the Wildflowers Grow

The Story of Sassy Sweetwater

Dancing Backward in Paradise

**Under the pen name Olivia Hardy Ray**

Annabel Horton, Lost Witch of Salem

Annabel Horton and the Black Witch of Pau

Fox Hollow

Pharaoh's Star

Nobody's Road

To join my mailing list please request at:

[jane@verajanecook.com](mailto:jane@verajanecook.com)