

Weeping Willow Volume One: Welcome to River Bend

Summary

Weeping Willow is a comedic soap opera about Lee Harris, a hapless accountant from Chicago, who discovers his wife has fallen in love with another man, packs his life into an SUV and leaves town. He finds himself stranded in a quirky town called River Bend where he is forced to re-examine everything as he starts over.

The story begins in a motel room where Lee has been fermenting for three days. He decides a night on the town will lift his spirits, so he finds a local watering hole called "The Office". It works until he's thrown in jail for public intoxication after closing the place down. The next morning, hung over and despondent, he stops to get money from an ATM to pay for the taxi back to the motel, and discovers his bank account is almost empty. He goes to a diner, hoping a bite to eat will clear the cotton from his head, finds his credit cards are maxed and realizes his wife has wiped him out. Then his car breaks down in front of the diner.

Twain, the scruffy, unwashed diner owner who has a prom carnation (and possibly Walt Disney) in his freezer, takes pity on him and offers work and a room in the attic until he can get back on his feet. Twain also gets him to his court date (where his paltry wages are garnished to pay his fines) and helps him fix his car.

Everywhere Lee turns, he is bombarded with flyers, ads and talk about The Willow Lane Theater and decides to use almost a week's pay to see a show there. Although angry with himself for the expense, the experience of watching the play is so powerful he decides to volunteer at the theater. There he befriends Peter, a robust man with no fashion sense and a big laugh who eats melted cheese when he's depressed, Stella, who isn't very good at her job as the bookkeeper (her main talents are hair flipping and sarcasm) and Bear, a quiet man's man who is the tech director and likes tools.

Meanwhile, Jim Ackerman, a fairly good-looking but incompetent young private dick from Chicago, comes to town. He's been hired by Lee's wife to find Lee and get his signature so she can sell their house. After some hesitation, Lee decides he will sign the papers and be done with her. Until he finds out how much she spent on the detective. He sends the detective home without a signature.

At Peter's suggestion, Lee gets a small part in a play at the theater. He's too nervous to over act and is actually fairly good in the part. After his debt to the court is paid, he wants to leave town but can't because of the play. Then his wife sues for divorce. Lee engages Andrew, one of his fellow actors who is a retired lawyer (and might have three nipples) to be his attorney. Andrew also tells Lee that Peter is gay and to be careful because he thinks Peter has fallen for him and he doesn't want to see Peter hurt.

During a drunken night playing Scrabble, Peter tells Lee that he's gay and is shocked to discover Lee already knows. Lee assures him he's not gay, wins the game with a seven letter word with a "q" and a "z" in it across two "triple word score" squares and falls asleep on the couch. While Peter pines for Lee, a very young actress and a very old, but strangely alluring director named Agnes also pursue him but he has his eye on Kim, a very pretty woman he met at the bar that first night on the town. He asks her out but ends up going to a concert with Abby, her big-boned, frizzy-haired friend.

Jim comes back to town. He's realized how bad a detective he really is and wants to re-invent himself like Lee did. He beats Lee out for a part. Because Jim wants to try every new thing he asks Peter out, much to Peter's dismay. After some clumsy, false starts, Jim and Peter end up in bed. Peter is very, very, very surprised but happy. Jim kind of hates it. Peter invites him for Thanksgiving dinner and Jim figures a second date, without the stress of the first one, will confirm or refute his straightness.

Peter cooks an amazing dinner for Jim. Abby and Lee go to party at her folks. After dinner, Jim lunges at Peter and they end up back in bed. After the party, Lee kisses Abby goodnight, a kiss that lasts too long to be friendly, and Lee goes home very happy. The next morning, Peter wakes to discover Jim, fully dressed, sitting in a chair. Across town, Lee wakes feeling good for the first time in months.

The story continues in Weeping Willow Volume Two: A Friend In Deed