

A VOW
for ALWAYS

THE
DISCOVERY
PART 6 OF 6

A Lancaster County Saga

A VOW
for ALWAYS

WANDA &
BRUNSTETTER



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*Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing:
thou hast put off my sackcloth,
and girded me with gladness.*

PSALM 30:11

CHAPTER 1

Darby, Pennsylvania

*I*s it true, Eddie? Do you really remember your name?” Susan asked excitedly as she rushed into the living room. “I just got home from my shift at the hospital, and Grandpa gave me the good news.”

He looked up at her from his seat in front of the fireplace and nodded. “I’m pretty sure my name’s Luke.”

“Luke’s a biblical name.” Susan smiled as a sense of hope welled in her chest. “Do you know your last name, Luke?”

He shook his head, a look of defeat clouding his turquoise eyes. “You’d think if I could remember my first name I’d know my last name, too, but I don’t. I still can’t remember anything about my past.” Luke groaned. “It’s so frustrating.”

Susan knelt on the floor beside him and

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touched his arm. “It’ll come to you, Eddie—I mean, Luke. Just give it time. Remember what the doctors have told you. Your memory could return slowly. It’s been about nine months since your accident. I think it’s a positive sign that you’re beginning to remember.”

He stared at the fire. “You really think so?”

“Of course. Seeing Grandpa’s pocket watch jogged your memory. With more time, other things will pop into your mind.” Susan hoped she sounded more confident than she felt, for she really wanted to offer him hope. For that matter, she needed hope, too—that Luke would remember everything about his past and that they wouldn’t discover he was married.



Bird-in-Hand, Pennsylvania

Grasping a can of insect repellent, Jonah sprayed all around the buggy shop, watching as several spiders came out of nowhere.

“This should have been done a whole lot sooner,” Jonah mumbled as he finished spraying. Usually they had this job done before October, but life had gotten in the way. So that morning, Dad had been bitten by a black widow spider. Besides pain and redness, Dad had developed some muscle cramping, a headache, and nausea.

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At the hospital, he'd been treated with an antibiotic, given some cream for the spider bite, and kept overnight for observation. The doctor had assured them that Dad would be alright, and luckily he didn't have a severe allergic reaction. His hand would probably be sore for a few days, and he was advised not to do any work in the shop until it felt better. Now it was Jonah's turn to carry the load, but he would do it gladly, just as Dad had done when Jonah broke his ankle.

Woof! Woof! Jonah smiled as Herbie, his folks' frisky border collie, darted into the shop with a small squash in his mouth and promptly dropped it on the floor at Jonah's feet.

"That's not a ball for you to play fetch with," Jonah scolded while he washed the bug spray off his hands. "Mom's not gonna like it when she finds out you've been stealing things from her garden."

Herbie looked up at Jonah with his big brown eyes, as though waiting for him to pick up the squash and throw it. When the dog got no reaction, he leaned down on his front legs, tail wagging in the air, and pushed the squash toward Jonah with his nose.

Jonah chuckled. "You don't take no for an answer, do you, boy?"

Woof! Woof! Woof!

He picked up the squash, placed it on the workbench, and looked for Herbie's rubber ball. He found it on a shelf near the door and cleaned

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it, too. “Here you go, boy—fetch!” Jonah pitched the ball out the door, and Herbie tore across the yard, yipping until he snagged the ball.

Jonah quickly shut the door so he could get back to work. As he finished up the buggy he and Dad had been working on, his thoughts went to Meredith. He still couldn’t believe she’d agreed to let him court her, and he couldn’t wait to spend more time with her.



Ronks, Pennsylvania

“It’s been nice visiting you,” Meredith told her mother, “but Levi and I really should go. I want to stop by Elam and Sadie’s place on the way home and let them know that Jonah and I will be courting.”

“I hope it goes well,” Mom said, leaning over to kiss the top of the baby’s head.

“I hope so, too.” Meredith gathered her belongings and carried Levi out to her buggy.

When she arrived at the Stoltzfuses’ place a short time later, Elam was home, but Sadie had gone shopping.

“Do you know when she’ll be home?” Meredith asked.

Elam shook his head. “You know my Sadie. She likes to shop, and if she ran into any of her

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friends along the way, she's probably gabbing like a magpie."

Meredith smiled, wondering if she should tell Elam her news and let him relay the message to Sadie. It might be easier. If Sadie had anything negative to say, at least Meredith wouldn't have to hear about it today.

"Why don't ya come in and have a seat?" Elam opened the door wider. "We can visit before Sadie gets back." He grinned. "It'll give me a chance to hold my *kinskinner* without Sadie hogging him the way she always does."

Meredith didn't know whether to laugh or cry. It was true; whenever Sadie had the chance to hold Levi, she was reluctant to let him go.

"I guess we could visit awhile," Meredith agreed. "Although if Sadie doesn't get here soon, I'll have to head for home and get supper started."

"You could stay and eat supper with us," Elam suggested, leading the way to the living room.

"I appreciate the offer, but I invited my friend Dorine and her family over for supper, so I'll need to go pretty soon."

"Can I hold the *boppli*?" Elam asked.

"Of course." Meredith smiled, seeing the look of joy on her father-in-law's face. She'd just handed Levi to Elam, when Sadie entered the room.

"We didn't hear you coming," Elam said, holding his grandson gently, as if he were afraid

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the little one might break. “Look who stopped by for a visit.”

“I’m glad you’re here,” Meredith said, smiling at her mother-in-law. “There’s something I want to tell you and Elam.”

Sadie’s eyes narrowed. She looked directly at Meredith. “If it’s about you and Jonah courting, I already know. What I don’t understand is why you kept it from us.”

“I was planning to tell you. That’s the reason I’m over here now.”

Sadie’s mouth turned down at the corners. “It’s too soon for you to be courting. Luke’s only been dead nine months.”

“I realize that, but it’s not like I’ve agreed to marry Jonah. We’ll just be getting to know each other better.”

“Courting can lead to marriage, and it often does.” Sadie’s voice was edged with concern. “You may not realize it, but I’m sure Jonah has marriage on his mind.” When she looked over at Elam for his support, he merely shrugged. “Do you love Jonah?” Sadie questioned, turning her attention back to Meredith.

Meredith dropped her gaze to the floor. “I think I do, although not the way I did Luke.”

“Humph!” Sadie tapped her foot. “Guess there’s nothing I can do about that, but I don’t have to like it.”

Meredith felt sick at heart. She’d known the

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feelings of others would have to be considered, and instinct had told her that Sadie wouldn't take the news well. But did she have to be so rude? Meredith wished everything could be like it was when Luke was alive. She wasn't the type to think only of herself. But things were different now. She had a son to consider. Would Sadie ever accept the idea of Meredith being with any other man than Luke?



Hearing the steady *clip-clop* of a horse's hooves, Meredith glanced out the kitchen window the following morning and spotted Jonah's rig pulling in. She noticed the bounce to his step as he hurried across the yard after securing his horse to the hitching rail. A cool, comfortable day such as this would put pep in anyone's step.

Autumn was in its finest glory now that October was in full swing. After the long, hot days of summer, the cooler weather was like a breath of fresh air. The smell of wood smoke wafting from chimney tops meant warmth inside from stoves being stoked, and Meredith could see her breath when she stepped outside each morning.

"*Wie geht's?*" Jonah asked when Meredith opened the door.

She smiled. "I'm fine. How are you this beautiful day?"

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“I’m doin’ good, but I can’t say the same for my *daed*.”

“What’s wrong?” Meredith asked, noticing the troubled look on Jonah’s face.

“He got bit by a black widow spider. Happened while we were working in the buggy shop yesterday.”

Meredith gasped. “*Ach*, my! Is he okay?”

“He showed no signs of being allergic to the venom, but his hand’s pretty sore, so I’ll be working in the shop by myself for a couple of days.” Jonah glanced back at his horse, pawing at the ground as though anxious to go. “I’d wanted to take you and Levi for a ride to look at the colorful leaves today, but there’s so much work at the shop that needs to be done, I’m afraid our little outing’s gonna have to wait a few days. Maybe this Sunday after church we can go—that is, if you’re free.”

“Sunday afternoon would work fine for us. The leaves are just peaking, and it’ll give me something to look forward to.” Meredith’s gaze dropped to the porch.

“Is everything all right?” Jonah asked, lightly touching her arm.

She didn’t want to hurt his feelings but felt he had the right to know about Sadie’s reaction to the news that they would be courting.

She lifted her gaze to meet his. “I went over to see Luke’s parents yesterday afternoon and

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told them you'd asked to court me.”

“How'd it go?”

“Elam didn't say much, but Sadie thinks it's too soon for me to be seeing anyone. She reminded me that Luke hasn't been gone a year yet.”

“What do you think, Meredith?” Jonah questioned. “Are you comfortable with me courting you right now, or would you rather wait a few more months?”

Meredith shook her head. “I don't want to wait. I think once Sadie sees how good you are with Levi and realizes you're not trying to take Luke's place she'll accept the idea.”

Jonah's eyebrows pulled together. “Maybe I should have a talk with her—try to make her see how much I care about you and Levi and that I only want what's best for you. I'd like to assure her that even though we'll be courting, I have no intention of changing how often they can see their grandson. I would never come between them and Levi.”

“I'm sure Sadie will be relieved to hear that, but I think we should give her some time. If she doesn't warm up to the idea soon, then you might try talking to her about it.”

“You're right, that's probably best.” Jonah grinned. “You're not only pretty but *schmaert* too.”

Meredith felt her cheeks blush. “It's nice of you to say, Jonah, but I don't always feel so smart. I'm still struggling to decide whether to rent out

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my house. I don't like the idea of leaving my own place and moving in with my folks."

"Would you like my opinion?" he asked.

"*Jah*, please."

"If you put your place up for rent and move in with your folks, that would take a financial burden off your shoulders. Plus, it will generate some extra income for you, and you can concentrate on taking care of Levi."

"You're right," Meredith agreed, "but things are always so hectic at my folks,' and sometimes my younger siblings get on my nerves."

"Well, I wish—" Jonah's words were cut off by the sounds of a horse and buggy arriving. When he saw Alma Beechy, he turned and started down the steps. "I'd better go now, Meredith, but I'll see you and Levi on Sunday afternoon."

Meredith smiled. "I'm looking forward to it, Jonah."



Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

"What are we going to do about Eddie—I mean Luke?" Susan asked as her sister, Anne, pulled her car into the hospital parking lot.

Anne's eyebrows arched. "What do you mean?"

"Ever since he remembered his name, he's

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been depressed—more so than before.” Susan frowned. “I’m really worried about him.”

“He’ll be fine,” Anne said, turning off the ignition. “Grandpa’s keeping Luke busy with projects around the house, so that should help with his depression. I’m sure that remembering his name has left Luke starving to recall everything else about his life before he came to know us, and that’ll happen in time.”

“I can’t imagine what it’s like for him, struggling to grasp details that seem to be just beyond his reach.” Susan sighed. “I hope Luke gets his memory back, but I’m also scared.”

“Of what?” Anne asked.

“That he might be married.”

Anne touched Susan’s arm. “You’ve fallen in love with him, haven’t you?”

Tears sprang to Susan’s eyes as she nodded slowly. “I’ve tried not to, but Luke’s so sweet. I feel so happy when I’m with him. I never thought there would be someone out there for me like Luke. Even though I don’t know anything about his past, what I do know of him. . .well, he’s everything I’ve ever dreamed a man could be.” She sniffed. “Maybe we made a mistake inviting Luke to move into Grandma and Grandpa’s house.”

Anne gave Susan’s shoulder a tender squeeze. “You need to stop worrying about this. When Luke’s memory returns in full, you might

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discover that he's not only single, but rich."

Susan snickered, despite her tears, knowing that a man's wealth didn't matter to her at all. "I doubt he's rich. If he were, he wouldn't have been wearing tattered-looking clothes when he was found unconscious at the bus station all those months ago."



Darby

"You okay, Luke?" Henry asked as the two men worked on some birdhouses in the garage. "You look a little down-in-the-mouth this morning."

Luke shrugged and blew on his cold hands. "I didn't sleep very well last night. Had a weird dream about seeing people with no faces. I've had that dream a few other times, too."

Henry set his hammer aside. "I have a hunch those faces you couldn't make out might be people from your past."

"Then why can't I remember who they are?"

"I don't know, but I think if you give it more time it'll come back to you."

"That's what Susan and Anne keep saying, but I have my doubts. If I was gonna remember, don't you think it would have happened by now?"

Henry scratched his head. "That all depends."

"On what?"

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“From what Susan’s told me about her work, some folks in your position get their memory back in pieces, a little bit at a time.”

Luke groaned. “And some never get it back at all. The doctors have warned me about that possibility.”

“Maybe for some that’s true, but you’ve remembered your first name now. I think that’s a sign you’ll be able to put the rest of the pieces together soon.” He thumped Luke’s back. “In the meantime, we have some birdhouses to build, ’cause the annual church bazaar is just a few weeks away.”

Luke picked up a piece of sandpaper. Despite his frustration, he would try to focus on the job before him and not get pulled back into the black hole of sadness that seemed determined to overwhelm him. Living with Susan and Anne’s grandparents had given him a sense of family—of belonging somewhere and doing something meaningful. Even so, he longed to know if he had a family of his own. If so, where did they live? Were they looking for him, or had they forgotten he’d ever existed?