

White Christmas Pie

WANDA &
BRUNSTETTER



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DEDICATION/ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With special thanks to Anna Yoder for sharing her delicious
White Christmas Pie recipe with me

*“And ye shall know the truth,
and the truth shall make you free.”*

JOHN 8:32



CHAPTER 1

THREE-YEAR-OLD GIRL ABANDONED IN SMALL TOWN PARK.
A lump formed in Will Henderson's throat as he stared at the headline in the morning newspaper. *Not another abandoned child!*

The little girl had been left alone on a picnic table in a small Michigan town. She had no identification and couldn't tell the officials anything more than her first name and the fact that her mommy and daddy were gone. While the police searched for the girl's parents, she would be put in a foster home.

Will's fingers gripped the newspaper. How could anyone abandon his own child? Didn't the little girl's parents love her? Didn't they care how their abandonment would affect the child? Didn't they care about anyone but themselves?

Will dropped the paper on the kitchen table and let his head fall forward into his hands as a rush of memories pulled

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him back in time. Back to when he was six years old. Back to a day he wished he could forget. . .

Will released a noisy yawn and rolled over. Seeing Pop's side of the bed was empty, he pushed the heavy quilt aside, scrambled out of bed, and raced over to the window. When he lifted the dark green shade and peeked through the frosty glass, his breath caught in his throat. The ground and trees in the Stoltzfuses' backyard were covered in white!

"Pop was right; we've got ourselves some snow!" Will darted across the room, slipped out of his nightshirt, and hurried to get dressed. He figured Pop must be outside helping Mark Stoltzfus do his chores.

When Will stepped out of the bedroom, his nose twitched, and his stomach rumbled. The tangy smell coming from the kitchen let him know that the Amish woman named Regina was probably making breakfast.

"It didn't snow on Christmas like Pop said it would, but it's sure snowin' now!" Will shouted as he raced into the kitchen.

Regina Stoltzfus turned from the stove and smiled at Will, her dark eyes gleaming in the light of the gas lantern hanging above the table. "Jah, it sure is. It would have been nice if we'd had a white Christmas, but the Lord decided to give us some fluffy white stuff today, instead."

Will wiggled his bare feet on the cold linoleum floor, hardly able to contain himself. "I can't wait to play in the

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snow with Pop. Maybe we can build a snowman.” He rushed to the back door, stood on his toes, and peered out the small window. “Is Pop helpin’ Mark milk the cows?”

Regina came to stand beside Will. “Your dad’s not helping Mark do his chores this morning,” she said, placing one hand on his shoulder.

Will looked up at her and squinted. “He’s not?”

She shook her head.

“How come?”

“Didn’t you find the note he wrote you?”

“Nope, sure didn’t. Why’d Pop write me a note?”

Regina motioned to the table. “Let’s have a seat, shall we?” When she pulled out a chair, he plunked right down.

“After you went to bed last night, your dad had a talk with me and Mark,” she said, taking the seat beside him.

“What’d ya talk about? Did Pop tell ya thanks for lettin’ us stay here and for fixin’ us Christmas dinner yesterday?”

“He did say thanks for those things, but he said something else, too.”

“What’d he say?”

Regina’s eyes seemed to have lost their sparkle. Her face looked kind of sad. “Your dad said he would leave a note for me to read you, Will. Are you sure there wasn’t a note on your pillow or someplace else in your room?”

“I didn’t see no note. Why would Pop leave a note for me?”

Regina touched his arm. “Your dad left early this morning, Will.”

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“Left? Where’d he go?”

“To make his delivery, and then he—”

Will’s eyebrows shot up. “Pop left without me?”

She nodded. “He asked if we’d look after you while he’s trying to find a different job.”

Will shook his head vigorously. “Pop wouldn’t leave without me. I know he wouldn’t.”

“He did, Will. That’s why he planned to leave you a note—so you would understand why.”

Will jumped out of his chair, raced up the stairs, and dashed into the bedroom he and Pop had shared since they’d come to stay with Mark and Regina Stoltzfus a few days ago. There was no note on the pillow. No note on the dresser or nightstand, either. Will ran over to the closet and threw open the door. Pop’s suitcase was gone!

Will’s knee bumped against the table, bringing his thoughts back to the present.

He lifted his head and glanced down at Sandy, his honey-colored cocker spaniel, who stared up at him with soulful brown eyes. “Did you bump my leg, girl?”

Sandy whimpered in response.

Ever since Will had been a boy, he’d wanted a dog of his own, but Pop had said a dog wasn’t a good idea for people who lived in a semitruck as they traveled down the road. Papa Mark had seen the need for a dog, though. A few weeks after Will had come to live with Mark and Regina, he’d been given a cocker spaniel puppy. He had named the dog Penny because she was the color of a copper penny. Penny had been a good

dog, but she'd died two years ago. Will had gotten another cocker spaniel he'd named Sandy. He'd bred the dog with his friend Harley's male cocker, Rusty. Sandy was due to have her pups in a few weeks.

Sandy nudged Will's leg again, and he reached down to pat her silky head. "Do you need to go out, girl, or are you just getting anxious for your *hundlin* to be born?"

Sandy licked his hand then flopped onto the floor with a grunt. Maybe she only wanted to keep him company. Maybe she felt his pain.

The lump in Will's throat tightened as he fought to keep his emotions under control. A grown man shouldn't cry over something that happened almost sixteen years ago. He'd shed plenty of tears after Pop had gone, and it had taken him a long time to come to grips with the idea that Pop wasn't coming back to get him. Tears wouldn't change the fact that Will had been abandoned just like the little girl in the newspaper. He wished there was a way he could forget the past—take an eraser and wipe it out of his mind. But the memories lingered no matter how hard he tried to blot them out.

Will's gaze came to rest on the propane-operated stove where Mama Regina did her cooking. At least he had some pleasant memories to think about. Fifteen years ago, he had moved with Papa Mark and Mama Regina from their home in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to LaGrange County, Indiana, where they now ran a dairy farm and health food store. On the day of that move, Will had made a decision: He was no longer English. He was happy being Amish, happy being Mama Regina and Papa Mark's only son.

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Now, as a fully grown Amish man, he was in love with Karen Yoder and looked forward to spending the rest of his life with her. They would be getting married in a few months—two weeks before Christmas. Will didn't need the reminder that he had an English father he hadn't seen in almost sixteen years. As far as he was concerned, Papa Mark and Mama Regina were his parents, and they would be the ones who would witness his and Karen's wedding ceremony. Pop was gone from his life, just like Will's real mother, who had died almost a year before Pop had left. Will's Amish parents cared about him and had since the first day he'd come to live with them. They'd even invited Will and Karen to live in their house after they were married.

As Will's thoughts continued to bounce around, he became tenser. Despite his resolve to forget the past, he could still see Pop's bright smile and hear the optimism in his voice as he tried to convince Will that things would work out for them after Mom had been hit by a car. Pop had made good on his promise, all right. He'd found Will a home with Regina and Mark Stoltzfus. In all the years Pop had been gone, Will hadn't seen or heard a word from him. It was as though Pop had vanished from the face of the earth.

A sense of bitterness enveloped Will's soul as he reflected on the years he'd wasted, waiting, hoping for his father's return. *Is Pop still alive? If so, where is he now, and why hasn't he ever contacted me? If Pop stood before me right now, what would I say? Would I thank him for leaving me with a childless Amish couple who have treated me as if I were their own flesh and blood? Or would I yell at Pop and tell him I'm no longer his son and want nothing to do with him?*

Will turned back to the newspaper article about the little girl who'd been abandoned. "It's not right," he mumbled when he got to the end of the story. "It's just not right."

"What's not right?"

Will looked up at Mama Regina, who stood by the table with a strange expression. He pointed to the newspaper and shook his head. "This isn't right. It's not right at all!"

She took a seat beside him and picked up the paper. As she read the article, her lips compressed into a thin line, causing tiny wrinkles to form around her mouth. "It's always a sad thing when a child is abandoned," she murmured.

Will nodded. "I was doing fine until I read that story. I was content, ready to marry Karen, and thought I had put my past to rest. The newspaper article made me think—made me remember things from my past that I'd rather forget." He groaned. "I don't want to remember the past. It's the future that counts—the future with Karen as my wife."

Mama Regina leaned closer to Will and rested her hand on his arm. "The plans you've made for the future are important, but as I've told you many times before, you don't want to forget your past."

"What would you have me remember—the fact that my real *mamm* died when I was only five, leaving Pop alone to raise me? Or am I supposed to remember how it felt when I woke up nearly sixteen years ago on the day after Christmas and discovered that Pop had left me at your house and never said good-bye?" As the words rolled off Will's tongue, he couldn't keep the bitterness out of his tone or the tears from pooling in his eyes.

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“I don’t know the reason your *daed* didn’t leave you a note when he left that day, and I don’t know why he never came back to get you.” Tears shimmered in Mama Regina’s eyes as she pushed a wisp of dark hair under the side of her white cone-shaped head covering. “There is one thing I do know, however.”

“What’s that?”

“Every day of the sixteen years you’ve lived with us, I have thanked God that your daed read one of the letters I had written to your mamm when she was still alive. I’m also thankful that your daed brought you to us during his time of need and that Mark and I were given the chance to raise you as if you were our own son.” She smiled as she patted Will’s arm in her motherly way. “We’ve had some wonderful times since you came to live with us. I hope you have many pleasant memories of your growing-up years.”

“*Jah*, of course I do.”

Mama Regina glanced down at Sandy and smiled. “Think of all the fun times you had, first with Penny and now with Sandy.”

Will nodded.

“And think about the time your daed built you a tree house and how the two of you used to sit up there and visit while you munched on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and sipped fresh milk from our dairy cows.”

Will clasped her hand. “You and Papa Mark have been good parents to me, and I want you to know that I appreciate all you’ve done.”

“We know you do, and we’ve been glad to do it.”

“Even so, it was Pop’s responsibility to raise me. The least he could have done was to send you some money to help with my expenses.”

Mama Regina shook her head. “We’ve never cared about that. All we’ve ever wanted is for you to be happy.”

“I know.” Will slid his chair away from the table and stood. “I think I’ll get my horse and buggy ready and take a ride over to see Karen. Unless you’re going to need my help in the store, that is.”

Mama Regina shook her head. “An order of vitamins was delivered yesterday afternoon, so it needs to be put on the shelves. But Mary Jane Lambright’s working today, and she can help with that.”

“Guess I’d better check with Papa Mark and see if he needs me for anything before I take off.”

“I think he plans to build some bins for storing bulk food items in my store, but he’ll be fine on his own with that.” Mama Regina smiled. “You go ahead and see Karen. Maybe spending a little time with your bride-to-be will brighten your spirits.”

“Jah, that’s what I’m hoping.”

“Don’t forget your *zipple* cap,” she called as he grabbed his jacket and headed for the door.

“I won’t.” Will smiled as he pulled the cap from the wall peg. He was glad he and Mama Regina had talked—it had made him feel a little better about things. He figured he would feel even better after he spent some time with Karen.