



The
**Quilter's
Daughter**

A NOVEL

DAUGHTERS of LANCASTER COUNTY | No. 2

Wanda &
Brunstetter

the
Quilter's
Daughter



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by
Wanda E. Brunstetter



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PUBLISHING

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ISBN 1-59310-714-5

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Published by Barbour Publishing, Inc., P.O. Box 719, Uhrichsville, Ohio 44683, www.barbourbooks.com

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Printed in the United States of America.

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*To my friend Katherine Baar,
who has walked through the fire and come out victorious.
To Betty Yoder,
a special friend with a spirit for adventure.
And to Donna Mae Crow,
a dear friend who is always there when I need a listening ear.*

*When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and
through the rivers,
they shall not overflow thee:
when thou walkest through the fire,
thou shalt not be burned;
neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.*

ISAIAH 43:2 KJV

PROLOGUE

A mysterious dark cloud hovered over Abby Miller's bed, pressing on her from all sides. Blinking against stinging tears, she drew in a ragged breath. An invisible hand pushed against her face, and she flung her covers aside. "*Ich kann nimmi schnaufe*—I can no longer breathe!"

Meow. Meow. Somewhere in the distance Abby heard the pathetic cry and knew she must save the poor kitten. With a panicked sob, she rolled out of bed, but the minute her bare feet touched the floor she shrank back from the intense heat. A paralyzing fear wrapped its arms around Abby, threatening to strip away her sanity. She lifted her hands to her face and rubbed her eyes, forcing them to focus. "Where are you, kitty? I'm coming, kitty."

Suddenly, she realized that her room was engulfed in flames—lapping at the curtains, snapping, crackling, consuming everything in sight. As the smoky haze grew thicker and the fire became an inferno, Abby grabbed the Lone Star quilt off her bed and covered her head. Coughing, choking, gasping on the acrid smoke, she stumbled and staggered toward the door. "*Feier*—fire! Somebody, please help me save the kitten!"

Abby bolted upright in bed. Droplets of perspiration dripped from her forehead, trickling onto her hot cheeks. Goose bumps erupted on her arms, and she realized that her cotton nightgown was soaking wet.

A howling wind rattled the windows with such force that

she was sure the house would come crashing down. Rain pelted the roof like a herd of stampeding horses, while thunderous roars pounded the night air.

Huddled under her patchwork quilt, Abby drew in a deep breath and tried to still her racing heart. She ordered herself to sit up and light the kerosene lamp on the small table by her bed. As the room became illuminated, she was able to see the cedar chest that had belonged to her grandmother at the foot of her bed. The wooden rocker Dad had made for her thirteenth birthday was positioned between the two windows, and her dressing table stood across the room where it always had. She'd been dreaming.

"*Jah*, that's all it was—the same horrible nightmare I've had before." Abby clutched the comforting quilt and wrapped it around her shoulders. "Oh, Lord, what does that night terror mean?"

CHAPTER 1

Abby opened the front door of her quilt shop and stepped onto the porch. A gentle breeze caressed her face, and she inhaled deeply. She hadn't slept well the night before and awoke this morning feeling tired and out of sorts. She'd been haunted by that dreadful nightmare again, the one she'd had several times over the last few months. Fire and smoke. Unable to breathe. Paralyzing fear. What was the meaning of the dream, and why did she have it so often? Abby remembered reading an article in *The Budget* some time ago about a young Amish boy in Indiana who'd been trapped in his father's burning barn. She'd been filled with compassion for the child's parents and wondered what terrible pain the boy must have endured in the blazing inferno. Could that newspaper article have stuck in her brain and caused the reoccurring nightmares, or was there something more to it, something buried deep in her mind? And what about those pathetic cries of a kitten she'd heard in her dream? Had there been a cat in the barn with the boy that day? She didn't remember all the details of the article and had long since thrown that issue of *The Budget* away.

Abby reached into the mailbox and retrieved a stack of letters. *These negative thoughts aren't good for me. Lester Mast and I have finally set a date for our wedding, the sun is shining, spring is in the air, and my business is doing better than ever. There's so much to be thankful for.*

"Anything good in the mail?" Lena asked when Abby reentered the shop a few minutes later.

Abby smiled at her sister-in-law and held up the stack of

envelopes. “Looks like a note from Mom.” She placed all of the mail but her mother’s letter on the desk and reached underneath to grab her metal lunchbox. “It’s a beautiful day, and I think I’ll go out to the picnic table so I can read Mom’s letter and eat lunch. Can you handle things on your own for a while?”

Lena nodded and repositioned a blond tendril that had slipped from under her small white head covering. “Jah, sure, I’ve already eaten my lunch.” She made a sweeping gesture with one hand. “As you can see, we are not so busy at the moment.”

Abby nodded and hurried out the back door. She placed the lunchbox on the picnic table, seated herself on one of the wooden benches, and tore open the envelope. She was pleased to discover that Mom had enclosed a white handkerchief with the initials A. M. embroidered in one corner.

“I’ll bet this is for my hope chest. Either that, or Mom thinks I’ve come down with a cold.”

Laying the hankie aside, Abby read the letter.

Dear Abby,

The enclosed handkerchief is a gift from Mary Ann for your hope chest. She said she was glad you’re engaged to a man with the same last initial as yours. That way, if you decide not to marry him, you can still use the hankie.

Abby chuckled. “Leave it to Mary Ann to say something like that. Never know what my youngest stepsister might come up with.”

She diverted her attention back to the letter.

Things are going well here. Naomi’s doing fine with her second pregnancy, and I think she and Caleb are hoping for a boy this time around. Samuel and Mary Ann are growing like weeds, and Nancy, who turned fifteen last month, is talking about courting and such. ’Course her dad would never allow it—not until she’s sixteen.

Matthew, Norman, and Jake continue to help their

dad on the farm, and my dear husband has never seemed so content.

I have some news of my own, which I hope will bring you as much joy as it has me. Abraham and I are expecting a baby.

Her mother having a *boppli!* Abby's eyes flooded with tears, causing the words on the page to blur. Could this be true? After all these years, was Mom, at age forty-seven, really going to have another baby? Using the new hankie to dab her eyes, she read on.

Since Lena is helping you at the quilt shop, I thought you might want to share the news with her and your brother.

Other than a queasy stomach, I'm feeling pretty good. As you can imagine, Abraham is thrilled about this. Who would have thought after being barren for so many years, the Lord would bless me with another child?

I know you're busy planning your wedding, but I'm hoping you can be here when the baby is born. Since that will happen in late October, and your wedding is not until the end of November, it shouldn't interfere with your big day. With Lena there to help in the quilt shop, maybe you can come a week or so before the baby is born and then stay a week or two after? I'm sure I'll be able to handle things on my own by then.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

*With love,
Mom*

Abby thought about the day her *mamm* had left Ohio for Pennsylvania. It had begun as a weekend trip to visit her cousin Edna. But then Mom ended up staying to help Abraham Fisher at his store, since his oldest daughter had run away from home soon after his son was kidnapped. It didn't take long for Mom and Abraham to fall in love, and soon they were married. Now, after four years of marriage, they were expecting a baby. Such a

miracle it was!

“Yoo-hoo! Abby, are you done with your lunch yet?” Lena called from the back door of the quilt shop. “A busload of tourists just showed up, and I could use some help.”

Unable to speak around the lump in her throat, Abby merely nodded and stood. She would have to wait until the tourists left to share Mom’s unexpected news with her sister-in-law.



“You look tired today, *Fraa*. Are you doin’ too much?”

Naomi Hoffmeir released a weary sigh. “Jah, Caleb, this wife of yours is a bit tired.” She patted her bulging stomach. “This one’s draining my energy more than Sarah did.”

Her husband nodded toward their two-year-old daughter, toddling around the store, checking out everything within her reach. “I’d say our little girl’s more than makin’ up for her quiet ways when she was a boppli.”

Naomi nodded. “You’re right about that.” She bent over and scooped Sarah into her arms. “I love you, sweet girl, even if you are a handful at times.”

“Want me to put her down for a nap?”

“Sure, that’s fine.”

Caleb extended his arms, and Sarah reached out her hands. “Jah, that’s right, come to your *daadi*.”

“I hope she cooperates and falls asleep right away,” Naomi said as father and daughter headed for the back room where they kept Sarah’s playpen and a few toys.

“I think she will. Already her eyes are droopin’,” he called over his shoulder.

Naomi sighed. *Sarah reminds me so much of Zach—full of energy and eager to investigate new things. How proud Mama would be if she were still alive and could see the precious granddaughter named after her.*

Naomi’s gaze went to the calendar hanging near the counter by the front door. In just a few weeks it would be Zach’s sixth birthday. Had her little brother been missing five years already?

A lump lodged in Naomi’s throat as she reflected on all

that had happened since the boy's kidnapping. She had run off for a time, unable to cope with the blame she felt for Zach's disappearance. Then later, shortly after she returned home, Papa had married Fannie Miller. Naomi and Caleb's wedding took place soon after he'd injured his hand while repairing a buggy, and ever since their marriage, they'd been working at the store that had been in Naomi's family a good many years.

Despite the fact that Naomi led a busy yet satisfied life, she often found herself thinking of Zach, praying for him, and wondering if he was happy and safe. Except for that one notice they'd read in *The Budget* shortly after he was taken, there had been no word on her little brother.

Naomi lifted her gaze to the ceiling. *Thank You, Lord, for the healing You gave our family during such a difficult time. And bless my little brother, wherever he might be.*

"How's business today?" Fannie asked, stepping into the store from the adjoining quilt shop.

Naomi turned to face her stepmother. "No customers at the moment. How's it going with you?"

"Things are fine at my shop." Fannie tapped her stomach. "But my insides are still pretty unsettled."

Naomi nodded, for she knew exactly how Fannie felt. She had been sick for the first six months when she carried Sarah, but this pregnancy was different. Not one day of morning sickness so far, and since she only had four months until the baby came, Naomi figured she was in the clear. Her only complaint was frequent fatigue. "Have you told Abby your exciting news?" she asked Fannie.

"Jah. Sent her a letter a few days ago. She should have gotten it by now."

"I'm sure she'll be as thrilled as we all are."

Fannie's hazel-colored eyes filled with tears. "It's such a miracle, me bein' in my late forties and gettin' pregnant after all these years." She gave Naomi a hug. "I'm glad our little ones can grow up together."

"Jah. God is good, isn't He?"

"That's for certain sure."

“Papa’s beside himself over this, ya know.”

Fannie crossed her arms over her ample chest, and her forehead creased with concern. “This babe won’t take the place of your missing brother. I hope you realize that.”

Naomi sucked in her lower lip. “I know.” But even as the words slipped off her tongue, she wondered if she believed them. *Would Papa be so caught up with the baby that he would forget he’d ever had a son named Zach?*

“Your *daed* deserves this chance with another child, don’t ya think?”

“Of course he does, and so do you.”

Fannie opened her mouth to respond, but an English woman entered the store just then. “I’ll let you get back to work,” she whispered. “And I’ve got a Log Cabin quilt that needs to be finished.”

“Talk to you later then.” Naomi turned toward the customer and smiled. “May I help ya with somethin’?”



Linda Scott aimed the digital camera she’d recently purchased and snapped a picture of her son. Jimmy had been playing in the sandbox, but he’d decided to try out the slide.

Jimmy takes after his dad, she mused. He’s not afraid of high places. Maybe he’ll be a painter someday, too. I’m glad he’s not like me—afraid of so many things.

“Do you mind if I share your bench?”

Linda slid over as a woman with dark hair cut in a short bob took a seat beside her.

“I’m Beth Walters, and that’s my son Allen.”

Linda’s gaze went to the dark-haired boy climbing the ladder behind her son. “My name’s Linda Scott, and my boy’s name is Jimmy.”

“Do you and Jimmy live nearby? I don’t recall seeing you at the park before.”

“Our house is a few blocks away. We normally come here after Jimmy gets home from morning kindergarten. But since there’s no school today, he wanted to play as soon as he finished breakfast.”

"My son is in afternoon kindergarten, so mornings usually work best for us." Beth glanced at her watch. "We've only been living in Puyallup a few months, and my husband has a night job at a lumber mill in Tacoma. I try to occupy Allen with quiet games at home, or we come to the park so Eric can sleep."

Linda stared at the camera clasped in her hands. She couldn't imagine having to plan her and Jimmy's lives around Jim's work schedule. Since her husband owned his own painting business and had several employees, Jim could usually come and go as he pleased. Although, lately he'd been working so much, he was seldom at home. Linda figured he might be using his job as an excuse to avoid her and their frequent arguments. She and Jim hadn't gotten along well since they'd adopted Jimmy five years ago.

"Looks like our boys are making friends," Beth said, her words pulling Linda's thoughts aside.

She looked up. Allen sat on one of the swings, and Jimmy stood behind him, pushing.

"Be careful, Jimmy. Don't push too hard or too fast."

"Allen will be fine," Beth said with a nod. "He always hangs on tight."

Linda lifted the camera and snapped a few pictures of the children. *This should prove to Jim that I'm letting our boy make new friends.*

"Jimmy looks small to be in kindergarten. How old is he?" Beth asked.

"He'll turn six in a few weeks."

"Allen celebrated his sixth birthday in February." Beth smiled. "Since we both live in the same neighborhood, I guess our boys will be starting first grade together this fall."

Linda nodded, remembering how Jim had wanted her to homeschool their son but changed his mind shortly before Jimmy started kindergarten, saying he thought it would be better if the child went to public school where he could play with other kids.

"Your dubious expression makes me think you're not looking forward to sending Jimmy to school all day. Is he your youngest?"

“Jimmy’s our only child,” Linda said, feeling tears prick her eyes. She’d wanted to adopt another baby as soon as Jimmy was out of diapers, but Jim flatly refused. He’d said one child was enough and reminded Linda that since they argued so much it wouldn’t be good to bring another child into an already troubled home.

“Eric and I have two older boys,” Beth commented. “Ricky’s eight and Brett’s ten. Having three kids so close in age was hard when they were little, but now that they’re older, it’s gotten easier.”

As the boys moved from the swings to the teeter-totter, Linda snapped a few more pictures.

“Maybe we can both bring our boys to the park next Saturday,” Beth said. “It will give us all a chance to get to know each other.”

The thought of making a new friend was pleasant. Linda hadn’t made any real friends since she and Jim moved from Boise, Idaho, to Puyallup, Washington, several years ago. Maybe it was time to reach out to another person. She and Jim certainly weren’t good friends anymore.