

the
HEALING

WANDA &
BRUNSTETTER



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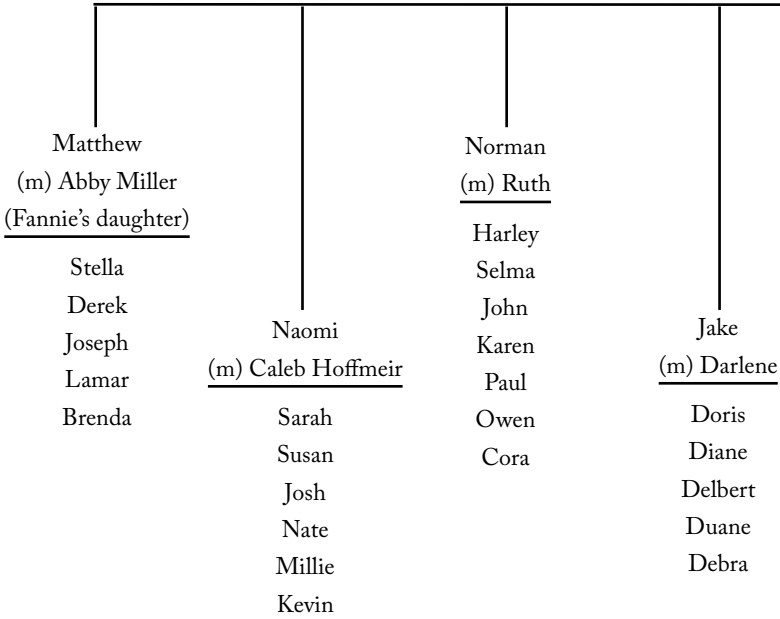
To Irene Miller, one of my very special Amish friends.

[God] healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.

PSALM 147:3

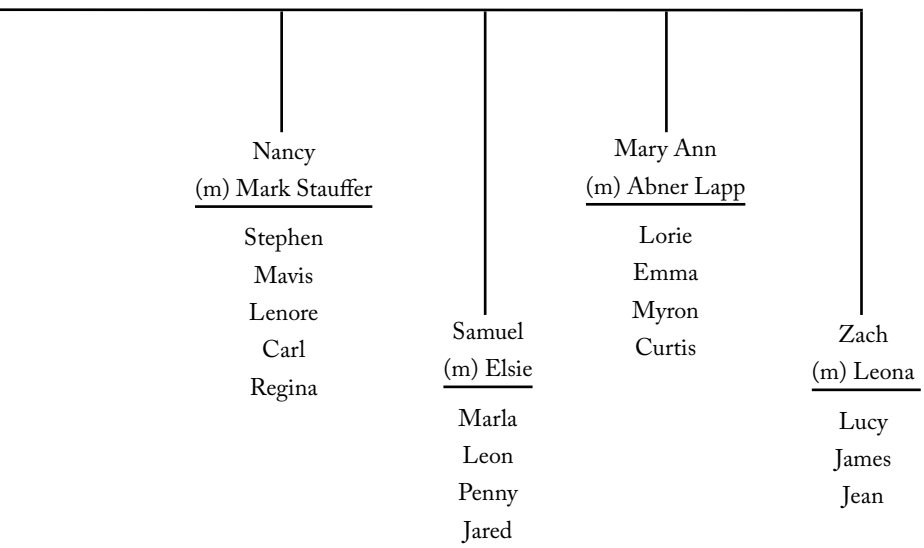
Fisher Family Tree

Abraham and Sarah (deceased) Fisher's Children

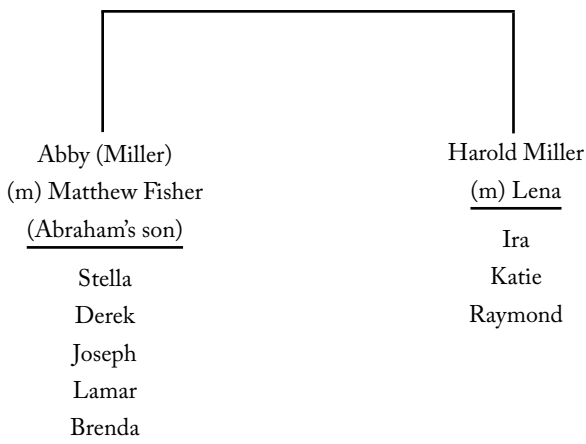


Abraham and Fannie Fisher's Children





Fannie's Children from her First Marriage



CHAPTER I

Paradise, Pennsylvania

A*lles is fix un faddich.*” Bishop Jacob Weaver clasped Samuel Fisher’s shoulder and gave it a squeeze.

Samuel, who stood on his front porch with a few others from his community, gripped the railing so tightly his fingers ached. The last few days, and even now, he’d felt as if he were walking through a thick fog, barely able to hear what anyone had said to him. Yet the truth of the bishop’s words—that all was completely done—slammed into Samuel with the force of a tornado. Overcome with emotion, he could barely manage a nod. They had just returned from the cemetery where they’d buried Elsie, his wife of ten years. He wasn’t sure how he’d made it through the last couple of days, much less the funeral and graveside service, but frankly, he was too tired and too numb to care. Somehow, he was now expected to carry on without her, and that thought was overwhelming.

Samuel’s mind hadn’t rested since that awful day when he’d found his wife at the foot of the stairs. Over and over he kept asking himself, *How do I go on? How can I survive without*

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my Elsie? With his feelings so raw, he couldn't imagine where to begin. Constant thoughts and plaguing questions drained every bit of his energy.

Samuel realized he wasn't the first person to go through something like this, but even knowing that, all he felt was despair. The misery was more than he could bear. Well, he couldn't do it! The thought of caring for his and Elsie's four children and going to work every day was too much to think about. But if he didn't work, who would buy food and pay their bills?

And if he stayed home from work and wallowed in self-pity, he'd only be reminded of Elsie. Everywhere he looked, he would see her face: in the kitchen, where she'd prepared their meals; in the yard, where she'd worked among the flowers; in their bedroom, where she would take down her hair at night and allow him to brush her long, silky tresses as they discussed the day's events and all their plans for the future—a future that would no longer include his beloved Elsie.

"I'll let you visit with your family now, but please remember, you can call on me or any of the ministers in our church if you need anything. Oh, and no matter how sad you feel, take the time to read God's Word and pray, because being alone with God is the only way you will find the strength to press on." The elderly bishop, who'd been a friend of the family for a good many years, gave Samuel's shoulder another firm squeeze and walked away, leaving Samuel to his disturbing thoughts.

Was it only last week that he and Elsie had discussed the approach of Thanksgiving and the huge meal they planned to have? They'd smiled and laughed as they'd reminisced about last year's holiday with their children and several of Samuel's family members sitting around the table. Elsie had commented on how she loved to watch the children's eyes grow big as

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saucers when the mouth-watering turkey, almost overflowing the platter, had been set in the middle of the table. All the laughter and chatter while they'd enjoyed the holiday feast was a special time for them as a family. Abruptly, those holidays and everything else Samuel and Elsie had shared had come to a halt. How quickly things could change.

In an attempt to force his thoughts aside, Samuel stared into the yard. A cold wind had scattered the fallen leaves all about. The trees were bare and empty—just like Samuel's heart. He knew that some men who'd been widowed married within the first year of their wife's death, but Samuel was certain he would never marry again, for how could anyone fill the horrible void left by Elsie's untimely death?

He caught sight of his children playing in the yard with some other children as though nothing had happened. Of course, the little ones didn't understand that Elsie was never coming back, but he was sure eight-year-old Marla and six-year-old Leon did. So how could they frolic about as if they hadn't just witnessed their mother's coffin being lowered into the ground? Surely, they must miss her as much as Samuel did. Maybe the only way they could deal with it was to run and play, trying to block it all out. Samuel wished he could find a way to block out the pain.

He looked away and sank into a nearby chair with a groan. *Nothing will ever be the same. I'll never be able to laugh with the children again. No more catching flies for their entertainment. No more walks in the woods, holding Elsie's hand. No more anything that used to be fun.*

Samuel closed his eyes, and a vision of Elsie's twisted body lying at the bottom of the stairs came uninvited into his head. Would he ever be able to get that image out of his mind? Would he ever know peace again?

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Marla and Leon had seen their mother fall that day, and when Samuel rushed into the house after hearing their screams, he'd found them close to her body, sobbing and pleading with her to open her eyes. The two youngest children—four-year-old Penny and two-year-old Jared—he'd discovered in the kitchen, hiding behind the stove. Even before the paramedics arrived, Samuel had known Elsie was dead. He'd found no pulse, and she wasn't breathing. Later, Samuel learned that Elsie had suffered a broken neck from the fall, as well as severe internal injuries. Their unborn baby, still underdeveloped in his mother's womb, had also perished.

"Samuel, you shouldn't be sitting out here in the cold by yourself."

Samuel's eyes snapped open. When he looked up and saw his older sister, Naomi, looking down at him with concern, he mumbled, "Didn't realize I was alone, and I'm too numb to feel the cold."

Naomi seated herself in the chair beside him. "I feel your pain, Samuel. I truly do."

Samuel stared straight ahead. "How can you feel my pain? Your husband's still alive, and you've never lost a child—not even one who wasn't fully formed."

"I realize that, but I hurt with you, and I want to help ease your pain."

"There's nothing you can do."

She reached for his hand and gave his fingers a gentle squeeze. He could see the depth of Naomi's concern in her ebony-colored eyes. "God loves you, Samuel, and so do I."

"If God loves me, He wouldn't have taken Elsie away from me and the *kinner*," Samuel whispered, as the bitter taste of bile rose in his throat.

"Zach was unfairly taken from our family when he was a

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boppli, but it didn't mean God no longer loved us."

"That was different. Zach didn't die; he was kidnapped." Samuel pointed to the front door, where Zach and the rest of their family had gathered inside after the funeral dinner. "Zach came back to us. Elsie's gone from this earth forever."

"Her body's gone, but she was a Christian in every sense of the word, and I'm certain that her spirit lives on in heaven," Naomi said softly. "Someday you'll see her again."

"*Someday* could be a long time from now." Samuel swallowed hard, fighting to keep his emotions under control. "I wish it had been me who'd died. Why didn't God take me instead of Elsie?"

"You mustn't say such things. Your kinner need you now more than ever."

Samuel lowered his gaze to the porch floor. "They needed their *mamm*, and I can't take care of them without her."

"You don't have to, Samuel. God will see you through this. With the help of your family and friends, you'll make it."

Samuel rose to his feet, trying hard not to let the fear and loneliness he felt at the very core of his soul overtake him. "I can't talk about this right now. I need to be alone." Taking the porch steps two at a time, he hurried into the yard. He was halfway to the barn when his older brother, Norman, stepped up to him. "Are you okay, Samuel?"

"How can I be okay when Elsie's gone?" Just saying those words were hard enough, making him wish it was all just a horrible dream.

Norman's brown eyes became glassy as he put his hand on Samuel's shoulder and gave it a reassuring squeeze. "You have to accept her death as God's will. It's the only way you'll get through this."

Samuel's face heated, despite the chilly air. "What would

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you know about it? Your *fraa's* not dead!" He shrugged Norman's hand away and stormed across the yard. It was easy for Norman to say such words when he'd never experienced the pain of losing his wife. Yet Samuel knew that his brother meant well, and if the tables were turned, he'd probably have tried to offer comfort to him in much the same way.

As Samuel moved on, he heard his brothers Jake and Titus, who stood outside the barn, talking about the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday.

"I wish I could stay and join you for the holiday," Titus said, "but we have a lot of orders that need to be filled in the woodshop before Christmas, so Suzanne, Allen, and I will have to head back to Kentucky tomorrow morning."

"It's good you could come for the funeral," Jake said. "I'm sure it made it easier for Samuel to have his whole family here."

My whole family's not here. Elsie was my family, and she's not here. Samuel's fingers clenched as he hurried his steps. When he entered the barn moments later, he was greeted by the soft nicker of the horses in their stalls. He dropped to a seat on a bale of straw and stared vacantly at Elsie's horse, Dolly, standing in one of the stalls, her head hanging over the gate. Did the mare know Elsie was gone? Did she miss her, too? He'd have to sell the horse now. If he kept the mare, he'd think of Elsie and be reminded that she would never hitch Dolly to the buggy again. Every waking hour, his thoughts were like a roller coaster, reflecting back over the ten years they'd been married. He wasn't ready to let go—he wanted to think about nothing but the memories they'd made together. But then his thinking would jump ahead, trying to imagine his life without Elsie. It was too much, too hard to grasp. For the last three days, he'd been falling into a fitful sleep at night, and finally, when he succumbed to exhaustion, it would be dawn.

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Mornings, he found, were the worst: his mind came to full alert, yet he still felt fatigued when he forced himself out of bed. He'd pace the floor, a million questions swimming in his head, wondering, *Where do I go from here? Will I always feel this restless and unsure?*

Halting his thoughts, Samuel noticed several pieces of hay falling through cracks in the loft above and was reminded of all the chores he had to catch up on. His pitchfork lay on the floor, where he'd dropped it the day he'd heard his children's screams that their mamm had fallen down the stairs.

A cat sprang down from the loft, and Samuel jumped. Purring softly, it rubbed its side against Samuel's legs. Elsie loved their cats, and they knew it. "Here, kitty, kitty" was all she had to yell, and the critters would come running, knowing their bowls had been filled. To Samuel, they were just plain old barn cats, good for only one thing—to keep the mice down. Elsie, though, loved all the farm animals and had a special way with them.

The barn door squeaked open and then clicked shut. Samuel looked up and saw Titus step inside. "I saw you come in here," Titus said. "I wanted to talk to you alone and thought this might be a good time."

"What'd you want to say?" Samuel asked. Truly, he just wanted to sit by himself for a spell, without interruption, but he didn't want to be rude—especially when his brother had come all the way from Kentucky to attend Elsie's funeral.

Titus took a seat on the bale of straw next to Samuel. "I'm real sorry about Elsie. It was a shock to hear that she'd died, and I know you and the kinner are really going to miss her." His dark brown eyes looked as sorrowful as the somber expression on his face.

Samuel, not trusting his voice, could only nod.

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They sat for several minutes in silence until Titus spoke again. "If you ever feel the need for a change, I want you to know that you'd be welcome in Kentucky. I'd be pleased to have you stay with me for as long as you want."

"Me moving from here won't bring Elsie back." Samuel knew he sounded bitter, but he couldn't help it.

"'Course not, but it would give you a new start. Maybe that's what you need." Titus leaned closer to Samuel. "Moving to Kentucky helped my wounded heart to heal after Phoebe and I broke up."

Samuel shrugged. "I'll give it some thought, but right now I just need to be alone." He couldn't imagine how moving to Kentucky could help his broken heart. Besides, his situation wasn't anything like Titus's.

"Okay, I'll head back to the house now, but remember, brother, I love you." Titus gave Samuel's arm a light tap and slipped quietly from the barn.

Dolly whinnied, and Samuel's vision blurred from the tears burning his eyes. *Oh, Elsie, I'll never love anyone but you. Sweet Elsie, I'll always miss you.* He lowered his head into his hands and let the tears flow freely.



Pembroke, Kentucky

As Esther Beiler stood beside her mother at the counter near the front of their store, she sensed that something was wrong. Mom had been acting kind of strange all morning, as though a heavy burden lay on her heart. Esther had been tempted to ask what was wrong but figured if Mom wanted to talk about it, she would. Besides, they'd been busy with customers all morning.

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“How long does Dad plan to be in Hopkinsville today?” Esther asked as she reached for a tablet and pen to start a list of supplies they needed for the store.

“Just long enough to run a few errands.” Mom’s dark brown eyes looked lifeless, as though she hadn’t been getting enough sleep, and Esther couldn’t help but notice the dark circles beneath her eyes.

The bell above the front door jingled, and Verna Yoder entered the store. “Brr. . .” she said, stepping up to the counter. “It’s downright cold out there today. Bet it won’t be long until we see some snow.”

“I hope not.” Mom shook her head. “I’m just not ready for *windere* yet.”

“Well, like it or not, Dinah, winter’s on the way. I can feel it in my bones.” Verna rubbed her hands briskly over her arms, hidden beneath her black woolen shawl.

“Have you heard anything from Suzanne since she and Titus left for Pennsylvania?” Esther asked, curious to know when her best friend might be coming home.

Verna gave a nod. “She called when they first got there, and then I discovered another message from her this afternoon.”

“How are things going for Samuel and his family?” Mom asked.

“Not so well,” Verna replied. “Suzanne said Samuel’s taking his wife’s death pretty hard, which of course is to be expected. The poor man didn’t even want to talk to most of the folks who’d come to the house after Elsie’s funeral. Suzanne said Titus was going to suggest that Samuel and his kinner move here.”

“What? After just losing his fraa?” Mom clicked her tongue noisily. “I’m surprised Titus would even suggest such a thing.”

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"I'm sure he meant well," Esther was quick to say. "He probably thought it would be good for Samuel to get a new start—go someplace where there aren't so many painful memories." Esther didn't know why she felt the need to defend Titus. It wasn't like he was her boyfriend or anything. The short time they'd courted after Titus had first moved to Kentucky hadn't amounted to anything more than friendship. Now he planned to marry Suzanne, which made Esther happy, because she knew Suzanne and Titus were very much in love and seemed well-suited for each other.

"I think it might be good for Titus's brother to move to Kentucky," Verna said. "Look how well Titus has done here. Everyone can see how happy he and my daughter are when they're together."

"You do have a point," Mom said. "Guess we'll just have to see whether Samuel accepts Titus's invitation, and if he does, only time will tell how well it will go."

Verna smiled. "Well, I'd best get what I came here for." She turned and headed down the aisle where the cleaning supplies were kept.

Sometime later after Verna had left the store, Mom turned to Esther and said, "There's something I need to tell you."

"What is it?" Esther questioned.

"I spoke with Dan's wife this morning." Deep wrinkles formed across Mom's forehead. "Dan and Sarah have put off telling us for as long as they could, but she admitted to me that your brother's been having some health problems lately, and after numerous tests, they've learned that the reason for his unusual symptoms is because he has multiple sclerosis."

Esther gasped. "That's *baremlisch!*"

"I agree. In some cases it can be a terrible thing, and from what I understand, the symptoms are often quite different for most people. Because Dan is so fatigued and suffering from

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such a loss of balance, he won't be able to keep his stands going at the two farmer's markets in Lancaster County." Mom drew in a quick breath. "So after talking with your *daed* about this, we've decided to sell the store and move to Strasburg so we can help out."

Esther's mouth dropped open. "After all these years of living here, you're moving back to Pennsylvania?"

Mom nodded. "Dan and Sarah need our help, and since we've had experience running our store, we ought to be able to handle the stands Dan has at Green Dragon and Root's Farmer's Market. Being in Pennsylvania will also put us closer to your brother James and his family, since their home in Lykens is only a few hours from Dan's."

Esther leaned heavily against the counter, feeling the need for support. It was bad enough that her older brother was ill, but if Mom and Dad sold the store and moved back to Pennsylvania, would they expect her to go with them?