

A woman with long, light brown hair styled in a thick braid is shown in profile, looking towards the right. She is wearing a light blue, long-sleeved dress with a ruffled collar. The background is a warm, golden-hour scene of a town with wooden buildings and a horse-drawn wagon. The overall mood is nostalgic and romantic.

TRACIE PETERSON

A

LOVE DISCOVERED

THE HEART *of* CHEYENNE

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NOVEMBER 1867

INDEPENDENCE, INDIANA

It seems all I ever do is attend funerals,” Marybeth Kruger murmured as the cemetery caretakers began shoveling dirt over her father’s casket.

Just days ago, all had been well. She and Papa had been talking about the coming of Christmas. Papa had agreed to freight a load of grain to Evansville from a farm thirty miles out. A snowstorm blew in and made the conditions worse than anyone had seen in years. The sheriff told Marybeth that Klaus Kruger was nearly to his destination just beyond Pigeon Creek when tragedy struck. The horses got spooked by the wind and snow, and the wagon ended up upside down at the end of the bridge. The doctor said Papa had broken his neck and died instantly. Marybeth supposed that was better than lingering in pain and suffering. But best would have been if he hadn’t had the accident at all. Her little sister, Carrie, wasn’t even two years old, and at the age of twenty with no husband or living relatives, Marybeth had no means to support her. What were either of them to do?

She felt someone touch her shoulder and turned. It was Edward Vogel. Her dearest friend in all the world. She saw the dampness in his eyes. He and her father had been close. She and Edward's wife, Janey, had been lifelong friends, but Janey's was another tragic death that weighed heavy on Marybeth.

"You ready to go home?" Edward asked her.

"I feel like I have no home." She looked across the cemetery. "I keep thinking of all the dead. There are so many. Our lives have been short moments of joy encompassed by sorrow and death."

He looked toward where Janey and his son were buried, and Marybeth couldn't help but follow his gaze. He'd married Janey after returning from the war. And then Janey had delivered a stillborn son and died herself shortly after. Marybeth had been devastated by Janey's death. They had been so very close.

They were surrounded by the graves of their departed loved ones. Marybeth's mother had died seven years earlier. Marybeth's stepmother, Sarah, had died after giving life to Carrie. Now her father was gone as well. For Edward, there was Janey and his son, his mother, and two brothers who'd died in the war.

"Marybeth, I was hoping to have a word with you."

She turned to find their pastor. She gave a nod. "Thank you for such a nice service, Pastor Orton."

"Your father was a good man and trusted friend, Marybeth. We were blessed to have him as an elder."

"Yes. He loved our church." She didn't know what else to say. A neighbor had offered to have Carrie over to play with her children while Marybeth attended the funeral, but she still needed to get home.

“I know this is a delicate matter and perhaps a poor time to bring up such a subject, but have you considered what you will do about your sister?”

Marybeth frowned. “What do you mean?”

The pastor’s expression was one of compassion. “Well, you and she are alone now, and you have no means of supporting her, much less yourself.”

“I’m sure there must be a better time to talk about all this,” Edward piped up. “The grave isn’t even covered.”

“Yes, I know. I feel terrible for it, but on the other hand, I cannot allow for a babe to go hungry,” the pastor replied.

Marybeth looked at the older man. He had been pastoring at the little Methodist church for as long as she had memory. He had presided over her mother’s funeral and her stepmother’s.

“Carrie isn’t going hungry,” Marybeth said in a barely audible voice. “The house is full of food. People haven’t stopped bringing food since the accident.”

“But that will only last a few days. In time she may well starve,” the man said. “That is why I’m suggesting you give her up. Let her be raised by a family who can provide for her. I’ve been speaking with Thomas and Martha Wandless. They’re quite well-off, as you know, and would be happy to take Carrie as their own.”

“But she’s not their own. She’s mine. I’ve raised her from birth and done a good job, if I do say so myself.” Marybeth’s ire grew. People always seemed to think they knew what was best for other folks, but Pastor Orton was the worst of all for trying to arrange people’s lives.

“Now, Marybeth, no one is trying to suggest you haven’t taken good care of your sister, and while your father was alive and providing for the both of you, no one would have suggested things go on any other way.”

“I should say not. Papa would have torn into the man who suggested he divide his family.” She fixed the pastor with a glare. “He would have despised the interference or suggestion that he couldn’t take care of his own.”

“And would have well been within his rights. But, child, you have no husband and no other relative to provide a living for you and your sister. Winter is upon us, and you’ll need money for heating and food. Where will you come by it?”

“I’ll help her.” Edward’s voice was reassuring. “I’m sure others will as well.”

“For a time,” the pastor said, nodding, “as good Christian folks should do, but it won’t be possible to continue forever.”

“I’m sure it won’t need to continue forever,” Edward replied.

“Edward!” They all glanced up at his name being called. It was his sister, Inga Weber. She waved and called out again. “Edward, could I speak to you for a minute?”

He turned to Marybeth. “I’ll be right back.”

He moved toward Inga, leaving Marybeth feeling deserted. How was she to fight for her sister without his support? Pastor Orton had always intimidated her, and she was sure he knew it. She glanced back at him and squared her shoulders. She would just have to be strong.

Pastor Orton shook his head. “You must think of poor Carrie. She has now lost her mother and father. The Wandless couple could provide her with that and give her a life of ease. They have plenty of money, and Carrie would live a life without want.”

Marybeth finally found her voice. “I’m her sister and the only mother she’s ever known. I could never give her away as if she were a doll I’d grown bored with. I pledged to my stepmother and my father that I would always care for her.”

“Marybeth, you need to see reason. You have no way to provide for Carrie. I’m sure you wouldn’t want the law to be involved.”

“What are you saying?” Marybeth fixed the older man with narrowed eyes.

“I’m saying that those who know better might become involved and take matters out of your hands legally. After all, we just want what’s best for your sister. She’s only a babe.”

“I’m what’s best for her, and she’s what’s best for me. We belong together. We’ve lost everything else. How could you be so cruel?”

“It’s not meant to be cruel, Marybeth. If you were to calm a moment, you would see that for yourself.” He reached out to take hold of her arm, but Marybeth pulled back. “Please, I’m only trying to help. Soon you’ll have to find a job, and you won’t be able to do that and care for your sister. There’s a family with the will and means to provide for Carrie. They can give her what you cannot, Marybeth. I’m sure they’d allow you to visit.”

Edward returned just then. “We need to be going.” He took hold of Marybeth and turned her from the pastor’s intense face. “Afternoon, Pastor.”

He led Marybeth to where the wagon stood, horses stomping in the snow and blowing out great clouds of breath.

“Are you all right?”

“He wants to take my sister from me. After everyone else I’ve lost. He wants to take her as well.” A sob broke from her throat, and Marybeth pulled her woolen scarf to her face. “Why did God allow this to happen?”

“I’ve asked myself that over and over about a lot of things.” He helped Marybeth up onto the wagon and then followed her. “He still hasn’t answered me.”

“It’s not my fault or Carrie’s that Mrs. Wandless is barren. I’ve long felt sorry for her, knowing that she wanted children. I’ve even prayed for her. People have suggested they adopt before now, but she’s always put that off, hoping to have her own baby. I don’t know why she suddenly feels the need to rob me of a sister.”

Edward picked up the lines and released the brake. “Busy-bodies. That’s what they are. Pastor Orton has always stuck his nose in where it wasn’t wanted. He thinks just because he pastors a church that he has the right to be in all the details of his flock’s life.”

“I know what he’s saying makes sense to him.” Marybeth let the tears run down her cheeks. The cold air stung, but she didn’t care. “He’s right that I don’t have any way to provide. Once the money Papa saved is gone, I honestly don’t know what we’ll do. At least he owned the house outright.”

“Then that will come to you and Carrie. I’ll talk to my brother-in-law, if you like. He can handle legal stuff for you since he’s a lawyer. I don’t know if your pa had debts, but I doubt it. He was pretty firm on paying cash.”

“Yes, he was, and I know of nothing that he owed. He wouldn’t even let me run a tab at the grocers’.” Marybeth wiped her face with her scarf. “Oh, Edward, I know you’re hurting too. Pa always said you were like the son he never had.”

“He was always good to me. My pa said he was the best man in Independence.”

“They were good friends. Right to the end,” Marybeth admitted. “I appreciated that you and your pa were pallbearers. I appreciate even more the way you helped Pa when he was alive.”

“He was easy to work with and good to teach me about

things I didn't know." Edward shook his head. "He always understood my desire to work as an officer of the law. He encouraged me when my pa started nagging me about quitting that work and coming back to help him with the horse farm."

"Pa had a talent for seeing what a man was cut out to do. He often spoke of what a great deputy you made."

"I wish my pa could understand like yours did. Raising horses is just not my calling. Inga loves it. Her boys love it too, so there will be someone to continue the family business. But I intend to go on working in law enforcement. I like being a part of the police department in Evansville."

"That's because you're good at it." Marybeth sighed and huddled down in her woolen coat. "I was sure hoping it wouldn't turn so cold so soon."

"Me too. People get mean when it gets cold. You'd think they'd go find a place to stay warm and keep inside, but instead it seems to make them seek attention out of boredom. We arrested three different groups of folks yesterday for fighting."

They turned down the street where Marybeth's father had purchased the family house over twenty-two years ago. Back then, the town of Lamasco, as it was called, was only about eight years old. Situated on the west side of Pigeon Creek across from Evansville, Indiana, this community had attracted a vast number of German immigrants, including Marybeth's mother and father. Marybeth had been the first of their family to be born in America. Her first six years of school had been given in English and German, so she spoke both fluently.

In 1857, the parts of Lamasco that had overflowed to the east side of Pigeon Creek had been incorporated into Evansville, but on the west side of the creek, folks had decided to

remain independent of Evansville and changed their name to Independence. Some of the older folks still called it Lamasco, but no one seemed to mind much.

Marybeth remembered when their house had been only one of a handful. Now houses were built side by side, block after block. It had been a wonderful place to grow up, and she'd hoped to give that life to Carrie, but now she wondered if that could still happen.

She looked over at Edward. Their talk of the horse farm seemed to have brought him even lower. "I'm sure your father will understand in time. He loves you."

Edward brought the horses to a stop and glanced her way. "It's of no matter right now. You've just lost your pa, and it's not right to focus on anything but that. Look, I'll be by tomorrow to bring you some more wood. Do you have plenty for tonight?"

Marybeth nodded and jumped down from the wagon. "I do. I'm gonna go stir up the stove and get a fire going in the fireplace before I head over to pick up Carrie. Thanks again for standing by me at the funeral. I know Pa would have been grateful for your support and all that you're doing for me and Carrie."

He smiled for the first time that day. "I'm honored to help. You and your pa got me through the worst of it when Janey and the boy died." He always referred to his son as "the boy," since he and Janey hadn't picked out a name for him. Edward had buried them together, with the boy safely tucked in Janey's arms. The gravestone simply read *Jane Vogel and Son*.

"That's why God gave us to each other," Marybeth said, letting the finality of the moment settle on her. Papa was really and truly gone. She glanced at the house and trembled.

“Best get in out of the cold. I’ll see you in the morning.”
Edward slapped the reins and headed on down the street.
Marybeth had never felt so alone.



Edward made sure the horses had adequate feed, then went into the house. He and Janey had rented this place at the edge of town when they’d married. That was shortly after he’d come home from the war. Of course, he’d needed time to finish recovering from a wound he’d taken at the Siege of Savannah. A ball cored a hole through his side and out the back in the blink of an eye. Loss of blood had nearly killed him, but thankfully nothing vital had been hit. Little by little, Edward had recovered enough to be sent home just after the first of the year in 1865.

Inga had been his nurse since their mother had mourned herself to death over the loss of his two brothers. She had died that September after news that Jacob had been killed in August at the Battle of Atlanta. Their brother Gunther had taken a minié ball two years prior to that at Shiloh. Mother had been convinced that she would lose all three when the brothers had enlisted to join Evansville’s Twenty-Fifth Regiment of the Indiana Infantry. And she’d nearly been right. Edward might have died but for the fact that after being wounded, he’d mistakenly been transferred with some special patients—sons of congressmen and senators—to a hospital in Washington. There, he’d received quality care that wouldn’t have been available on the battlefield. Most likely it had saved his life. Inga called it God’s provision. Edward sometimes wondered, however, if he had cheated death and that was why Janey and the boy had to die.

Once inside the cold house, Edward made a fire in the