

THE *D*EACON'S *F*AMILY

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*M*ENDING
FENCES

SUZANNE
WOODS
FISHER



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To my newest granddaughter, Annie,
who was born as this novel reached its polish-up stage.
You have been welcomed into a family who cherishes you.
May the Lord bless you and keep you, dear little one.



Cast of Characters

Luke Schrock—recently returned to Stoney Ridge after a stint in rehab (or two. Or three). Originally introduced in *The Inn at Eagle Hill* series. His story continued in *The Bishop’s Family* series.

Amos Lapp—deacon of Stoney Ridge, husband to Fern, owns Windmill Farm. Originally introduced in the *Stoney Ridge Seasons* series.

Fern Lapp—wife of Amos Lapp. Originally introduced in the *Stoney Ridge Seasons* series.

David Stoltzfus—bishop of Stoney Ridge. Originally introduced in *The Revealing*, book 3 of *The Inn at Eagle Hill* series. Main character in *The Bishop’s Family* series.

Isabella “Izzy” Miller—new to Stoney Ridge. Boarding at Windmill Farm.

Hank Lapp—uncle of Amos Lapp. Originally introduced in the Stoney Ridge Seasons series.

Jesse Stoltzfus—son of David Stoltzfus. Introduced in *The Revealing*, book 3 of The Inn at Eagle Hill series. His story continued throughout The Bishop's Family series.

Jenny Yoder—girlfriend of Jesse Stoltzfus. Introduced in *The Lesson*, book 3 of the Stoney Ridge Seasons series.

Alice Smucker—victim of Luke's mischief, which triggered agoraphobia and ophidiophobia. Introduced in *The Haven* and *The Lesson*, books 2 and 3 of the Stoney Ridge Seasons series.

Teddy Zook—Amish carpenter.

Ruthie Stoltzfus—daughter of David Stoltzfus. Former girlfriend of Luke Schrock. Main character in *The Devoted*, book 3 of The Bishop's Family series.

Patrick Kelly—convert to the Amish. Love interest of Ruthie Stoltzfus. Main character in *The Devoted*, book 3 of The Bishop's Family series.

ONE

A year had passed since Luke Schrock's exile from Stoney Ridge began. A very long year. He'd been in and out of rehab twice. Wait. Hold on. Make that three times. He'd forgotten the three-day holiday weekend he'd checked himself out and went on a bender.

The bus swerved and bumped on the country roads, stirring his stomach and ratcheting up his anxiety. The bus was stuffy and hot; it made him long for fresh air and cold, all at once. He was on his way back home.

Home. Luke had a feeling he couldn't name exactly, but one he'd never had in relation to home before. It used to mean security, belonging, unconditional acceptance. What he felt now contained that, all that, but to today was added a hint of desperation.

This was a bad idea. A terrible idea. He'd never intended to return to Stoney Ridge. The counselor had strongly recommended that Luke find sober, supportive living arrangements. What could be more sober than an Amish farm? he asked Luke.

Uh, well, that depends. Luke had been living among the Amish as he developed a dependency on alcohol.

But then David Stoltzfus, his bishop, agreed with the counselor. He had told him to stop running away from his problems, that coming home again was the only road to manhood.

He recognized the fork in the road that would lead the bus straight into Stoney Ridge. Pulling the cord to hop off the bus seemed like a very appealing option. He could head right toward Lancaster, rather than left to Stoney Ridge. He could do it. He should do it.

But he didn't. The bus zoomed left.

David had promised he'd be waiting at the bus stop. Luke held out a sliver of hope that his mother might be there too, and maybe his younger brother Sammy. There was no chance that Galen King, his mother's husband, would be there. No chance. Not after what had happened to Galen's prized horse. Nope. No chance.

When Luke had asked David what he would do with himself once he was back in town, the bishop was vague. "One thing at a time, Luke. Let's get you home first."

Luke had wanted to ask him if home meant the Inn at Eagle Hill, where his mother and brother and stepfather lived, or if he was using "home" as a metaphor. But something inside held him back from asking, partly because he had a feeling David didn't know the answer.

David Stoltzfus had gone above and beyond the call of duty for Luke this last year. He'd come to visit him regularly, even when Luke told him not to bother. But David did bother, over and over again. He brought books to read, for he knew Luke loved to read. He read them too, and then

they would discuss them. Conversation grew easier between them. Those visits, they meant a lot to Luke, and he hoped David had some idea how much. The reason David had never given up on Luke was, he said, because God never gave up on people.

The bus hit a pothole and jolted Luke against the window. He recognized the passing farm as Windmill Farm, belonging to Amos and Fern Lapp, and took note of the new mailbox. Not so long ago, he'd put a cherry bomb in their old one and blown it to smithereens.

Why had he done that? It was a circling discussion in group therapy—what were triggers that caused destructive behavior? The counselor encouraged everyone to identify those triggers, so they'd know to recognize them. And then, to redirect thoughts and feelings and behaviors toward something beneficial.

Luke had tried to identify his triggers, tried and failed. Why had he hurt people, like the Lapps, who had been so good to him? He couldn't find an answer.

For a short while, before blowing up the Lapps' mailbox, he'd even apprenticed for Jesse Stoltzfus's buggy shop at Windmill Farm. Like so many opportunities Luke had been given, it hadn't gone well. The counselor suggested that if anyone got too close to Luke, he would do something to push them away. Translation: self-sabotage. If anything went too well, he would find a way to ruin it. He saw that in himself. What he didn't know was *why*.

That was another reason the counselor had consistently encouraged Luke to return to Stoney Ridge. "Find out *why*," he'd told Luke. "You'll never move forward until you find out why."

“Moving forward.” Translation for counseling code: *after-care*. Luke had grown savvy to counselor code. The first time he was released from rehab, he was adamant that he would not return to Stoney Ridge. Moving forward, he was convinced, meant moving on. Make a fresh start.

He tried. He failed. Back he went to rehab.

This time, rehab lasted a little longer. Instead of sixty days, it was ninety days. “Better chance for long-term success,” the counselor said. Not so for Luke. As soon as he was released, he went on that three-day bender. David bailed him out of jail and took him back to the clinic. This time, it lasted more than six months. Now *that* should give him a much, much better chance not to relapse. Added to that was the warning from David that this was the last rescue. If he relapsed, if he ended up in jail, he’d stay there. Three strikes was the limit, even for David, the most tolerant man in the world.

Luke had to agree with the counselor on one thing: he didn’t seem to be able to move forward. “Why not go back and face your past?” the counselor said. “What do you have to lose?”

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Absolutely no one. Grudgingly, Luke agreed to return to Stoney Ridge. It was one thing to say no to your counselor, but nearly impossible to say no to your bishop, especially one like David.

After making that decision, he’d had the first good night’s sleep in . . . well, maybe in the entire last year. But that didn’t mean he wasn’t anxious about his homecoming. He was. These Amish, they had long, long memories.

At the turnoff to Windmill Farm, he noticed a woman standing behind a beat-up farm stand. Amos had fine or-

chards, old trees that had been lovingly tended. Luke remembered that very farm stand, topped with baskets of tree ripened fruit, jugs of cider, and an honest jar. He also thought of how often he used to dip into that jar when he was low on cash.

Ouch. Another stinging memory.

David called those stinging memories one of the greatest gifts given by the Holy Spirit. Convicting memories, David called them. Conviction was meant to turn us to confession. And confession brought us back to God.

Luke doubted David ever had much of anything to confess. If he did, he would know the sick feeling that came along with the stinging memories. The disgust and self-loathing.

The bus jolted again. He squinted, wondering if Fern Lapp was the woman at the farm stand, but quickly dismissed that thought. Fern was thin, wiry—small but mighty. A force to be reckoned with.

This woman looked young. She was tall and held herself erect, like a queen. She wore a Plain lavender dress with a black apron. A blue kerchief kept the hair out of her eyes. Luke leaned closer to the window to peer at the woman as the bus passed by. Who was she? Just then, she looked up and waved at the passing bus, and Luke felt a shock run through him. *Izzy Miller*. She'd been a patient at the rehab center during his first attempt to get clean and sober. He'd been in a group session with her once or twice. She hadn't talked much, but he did notice her. Oh yeah, he noticed her all right. She wasn't the sort of person you'd easily forget. He remembered thinking she was the prettiest girl he'd ever seen. High, wide cheekbones; snapping dark brown eyes; luxurious brunette hair. He also remembered her as being

frustratingly aloof; he had tried, without success, to get her attention a few times. Why in the world was she at Windmill Farm, of all places? And why was she dressed Plain?

Well, well. Luke's grim spirits lifted considerably. Stoney Ridge was looking better already.



Izzy Miller rearranged the freshly picked red cherries in the bowl so they'd look irresistible, which they were. Plump to the touch, bright red in color, juicy in taste. Too luscious, she thought, to end up in jam or pies. Not these cherries. They were meant to be eaten the way nature intended. Freshly picked, still warmed from the sun, bursting with juice.

She took pride in how her displays looked, improving their appearance from Fern's practical, no-nonsense style. Even the weathered old farm stand was small and rickety, easy to overlook. She couldn't do anything about its condition, but she could definitely present Amos's orchard fruits in an eye-catching way.

Amos harvested bushels of fruit from his orchards—old trees that produced bumper crops of delicious fruits. *Wie der aum, so die Frucht*, he had taught her. *Such as the tree is, such is the fruit.* He treasured his old varieties. Heirlooms or antiques, they were now considered. Amos said they were just the varieties his wise grandfather knew to grow.

The season started with early flowering cherries in late May and early June, peaches and plums in July, pears in August, and ended with apples in the fall. Fern had a huge garden—bigger than most anyone's backyard, at least the yards Izzy'd seen—and harvested a wide variety of vegetables and flowers. Thanks to her greenhouse, Fern was the first in

Stoney Ridge to bring a vine-ripened tomato to the dinner table. Amos said that Fern didn't just have a green thumb, she could grow anything out of nothing.

Growing fruits and vegetables, even flowers, was Amos and Fern's expertise. Izzy was the one who'd arranged the displays with an artistic flair, so much so that they drew attention and became a feast to the eyes as well as the stomach. Like the bus driver who just passed by—he used to zoom past the farm stand without any acknowledgment. Last year, Izzy had set up bouquets of flowers in galvanized buckets, and the driver stopped the bus and jumped out. It was his wife's birthday, he told Izzy, and he hadn't remembered until he saw those bright, bold peonies in the buckets. His wife's favorite flower. Last year, he'd forgotten her birthday and he didn't want to face her wrath again, so he bought two bundles. One for this year and one to make up for last year. He thanked Izzy profusely and told her she might have saved his marriage.

Since then, that bus driver would stop the bus to let everyone out to buy produce. He must have told others too, because Amos and Fern's farm stand had been included on the route of summertime tourist buses swirling through Amish country from Lancaster. By last October, as they were closing up for the year, Amos announced that Izzy had quadrupled the profits from the farm stand. Four times! Fern joked they could soon retire and let Izzy manage the farm.

It was astounding to Izzy. It really was. She'd never been told she had any natural talent, had never thought she could be good at anything. She knew Fern was just teasing, but her words sparked a deep yearning in her, struck a chord in her heart. What Izzy hoped Fern had meant was that she could remain on indefinitely at Windmill Farm. *Ein Platz am Tisch.*

It was a Plain expression that meant a person had a place at the table. That they had a family they belonged to. Izzy loved repeating the phrase to herself, trying hard as she was to master the Penn Dutch language. For the first time in her life, she was wanted. First time.

Look at me, she thought. *I'm living the life I've wanted for as long as I can remember.* She had a roof over her head, she had a true friend—Jenny Yoder—and she had Amos and Fern Lapp. She had everything she'd ever dreamed for. Almost everything. There was still one more piece of her dream—to find her mother. To bring her to Windmill Farm.

The counselor at the rehab clinic had warned her about holding on to such a dream. “I’m all for tying up loose ends,” he said, “but I’m worried you’re setting yourself up for disappointment. You can’t control other people, Izzy. You can only control yourself. A dream like that—it’s closer to a miracle.”

But, oh my soul, “miracles do happen,” Izzy had told her counselor. “Just look at me.”



As promised, David Stoltzfus was waiting for Luke at the bus stop on Main Street in the heart of Stoney Ridge. He thrust his hand out to shake Luke’s and clasped him warmly on the shoulder. “Welcome home,” he said, and Luke felt tears sting his eyes. No one else was here but David. No mother, no brother. And yet . . . David was here.

Luke followed him to the buggy, tossed his backpack in, and climbed up. David handed him the reins, but he shook his head. “I’m a little rusty.” There was truth to that, but more important, he felt disoriented, as if he’d never been in a buggy before.

David slapped the reins and clucked to the horse to set it trotting; it lurched forward before settling into a steady walk. “Luke, there’s been a few changes in Stoney Ridge.”

“Like what?”

“Well, for one, Amos Lapp is now the deacon. Abraham moved to Florida to be with his daughter.”

“And the ministers? Have they changed?”

“Just one. Gideon Smucker.”

“Sadie’s husband?” Luke squinted. “I always thought he was afraid of his own shadow.”

David glanced at Luke. “He’s a fine minister. Wise and humble.” He handed Luke a sealed envelope.

It was from Luke’s mother, Rose. He made no effort to open it. “Let me guess. She wishes she could’ve been here today, she really, really does. But Galen isn’t quite ready to welcome me home.”

“Maybe you should just read it.”

Luke sighed and broke the seal.

Dearest Luke,

I’m sorry, so very sorry, that I’m not in Stoney Ridge to welcome you home. I’ll let David explain our circumstances. Please believe me when I say that the timing of this opportunity had nothing to do with your homecoming. I am so proud of you, Luke. You’ve fought a great battle, as I knew you could. And I believe that a bright and wonderful future is ahead for you.

*Love,
Mom*

Luke wasn't surprised. He looked up. "So what are these oh-so-special and ill-timed circumstances?"

"Galen was needed in Kentucky. His cousin breeds Thoroughbred horses down there and had some kind of accident. Broke his leg in two places, needed surgery and pins." David shuddered. "Anyway, he asked Galen to help him get through the next few months. Busy months for horse breeding. Galen's stable was empty—he hadn't purchased any horses to train for the summer, so he said yes to his cousin. It's just short-term. They left ten days ago."

Luke ran through the scenario in his mind. He knew of that particular cousin. Each spring, Galen would travel to Kentucky to buy two-year-old Thoroughbreds, retired right from the races, to train them for buggy work. He always stayed with that cousin of his. They loved horses more than people, Luke always thought. "She didn't even say goodbye." He cringed. Had he said that out loud?

"Your mother wanted to. She did. But your counselor advised against it."

Luke snorted. "Because I might decide not to return to Stoney Ridge, had I known?"

"Because you need to make your own decisions, based on what's best for you. Your mother wants you to come visit in Kentucky, as soon as you're ready."

Ready. What did that mean?

As they reached the turnoff to the Inn at Eagle Hill, David drove the buggy right on by. "Uh, David, I'd like to go home."

"Well, that's another one of the changes. The Inn is being run by someone else."

"Who?"

"Ruthie." He glanced at Luke. "Patrick's helping her."

Ah, the second blow to Luke's gut. Ruthie, David's daughter, had been Luke's childhood sweetheart, the one person who understood him, whom he counted on, up until that messy time when everything fell apart. Ruthie met Patrick and Luke ended up in rehab.

"So where are you taking me?"

"Windmill Farm."

Luke let out an indignant huff. "Oh, David, come on. Your own son used to call it Fern's Home for Wayward Boys. I think I've gotten past that stage."

"Amos needs help with his orchards this summer, and . . ."

"And *what*?" What was it that David didn't want to say? That Amos was a kind man, and probably the only one who would be willing to host Luke.

"Amos is willing to provide room and board for you, in exchange for working his orchards." The horse had slowed to a crawl, so David flicked the reins to urge it back into a trot. "Birdy and I would have welcomed you into our home, but there's not an inch of space to be spared, not with the babies. And there's no work to be done. I'm no farmer."

"I could work at Bent N' Dent. I could sleep in the back room. I could stock shelves. Make deliveries."

David was quiet for so long that Luke wondered what was running through his mind. Probably . . . that Luke might be bad for business. But then David surprised him. "Let's try this first. If it doesn't work out, then you can work at the store. But I think you might enjoy working for Amos. He's a wealth of knowledge about farming. About all kinds of things. And he truly needs help this summer."

Luke was silent for the rest of the trip, eyes fixed on the rhythmic clip-clops of the horse's shoes on the pavement.

So, all these changes told him a great deal. His family had left town, he wasn't trusted to run the Inn, or to work at the store, and no one in Stoney Ridge seemed to want him here. Why had he even come home at all? He had no home, no one to welcome him back. Where did that leave him? Without his old life and not quite coming up with a new one. In between, floating, nowhere.

He still couldn't answer why he'd come back to Stoney Ridge, even when the counselor had tried to get him to put feelings into words. For some inexplicable reason, Luke knew that David was right. The only path to manhood was to be here, to face his past and make amends. After that, he could leave.

He would leave.