

THE LAST VISION

THE LAST VISION

A Novel by

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ROSEBURG, OREGON

LINEN VAIL BOOKS

2013

The Last Vision:
Book Four of the Star Valley Saga

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Second Edition

Published December 2023
ZEBBY.ORG — LINEN VAIL BOOKS
Roseburg, Oregon
zebby.org/books

First Edition Published October 2013

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Printed December 2023
LULU.COM

ISBN: 978-1-304-79280-8

Second Edition: 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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CHAPTER ONE

GRIEF

THE end was coming, at least she thought it might be. There, in an old, almost worn out rocking-chair sat Joanna. She was facing the equally old stone fireplace. Her back was towards the door, as though by not looking at it everything that had just happened, hadn't.

But because she was sitting there crying, she knew it had happened. Try as she might, she could not stop the tears or the uncontrollable sobbing. Her body was shaking violently with each tight breath that she took.

The pain in her chest was caused as much from her muscles trying to get oxygen to her heart as it was from the news that she had just heard. She felt like she was going to die. The warmth in her body made her feel like a bonfire had been built all around her from which she could see no escape.

One of her husband's two hired hands had just

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come barging into the house screaming. “He killed your husband, then he killed Blake!” Blake was her husband’s other hired hand. The guy himself was panicked. “I’m getting out of here before he comes after me. You’d better do the same thing. I told your husband not to burn the guy’s barn. I told him!”

Then he left, slamming the door behind him, not saying another word. He didn’t have to.

Every word she and her husband Troy had argued about earlier in the evening came back to haunt her. She begged him not to go, explaining that it was their neighbors’ drinking water, and they had the right to fence it off. Her husband could water their stock out of the common watering-hole at the end of the little valley, but he would hear nothing of her words. His temper was bigger than he was, and quicker than one of their horses. Many times, she had been afraid that he would strike out and hit her. Luckily, he never did. She was sure he had come close, but never once did he actually hit her. Now, he never would.

She knew that the loud voice of the hired hand and the slamming of the door would probably wake her son. He was twelve sun-cycles old and beginning to be a real help to her. How was she going to explain all of this to him? Could she even talk? Maybe she wouldn’t have to. Any minute, her heart was going to stop from the pain. Then, it wouldn’t matter. She was right, not

GRIEF

about her heart stopping, but about all of the commotion waking her son.

Jacob was a great son, and he was unlike his father in most ways. He had a slow temper and a kind heart, going out of the way to help anyone in need of it. Most boys his age stood a head shorter than Jacob. He would grow up to be a very tall and gentle giant, albeit one without a father.

Joanna heard a yawn over her sobbing, and looked towards Jacob's bedroom doorway. There he stood, wiping the sleep from his eyes.

“Are you crying, Mom? What's wrong? Was that Dad who slammed the door? Did you find out about Marsha?”

In Jacob's mind, nothing could have made his mother cry except finding out about Marsha. It was the only explanation, hence the name Marsha came out.

Joanna tried to talk to him. Her emotions, her loss, and therefore her crying, would not allow her to speak consecutive words, and those she did speak were chopped up and almost unintelligible. Words going into the ears of an intelligent woman, even in times of great stress, are heard and processed. Her mind was not only trying to cope with the death of her husband, but now with the implications of her son's words. Her mind won a slight battle with her

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heart, calming her down just enough to ask her son.

“Wh—what about Mar—Marsha?” Marsha was a beautiful young girl from the village. She brought them fresh bread, fruits, and vegetables every sunrise, and milked two of their many cows. In return, she got to keep the milk from one of them.

Troy hated everything to do with planting and harvesting. He was a rancher, not a farmer. His passion was cattle, pigs, and horses. He believed that tilling the soil was beneath his station in life.

Jacob didn’t say anything in response to his mother’s question. He knew as soon as he mentioned Marsha’s name that he had guessed incorrectly. Now, he was afraid to say anything else.

Finally, after what seemed like forever, Joanna was able to calm down enough to re-ask the question, “What about M—Marsha?” It was still hard to get out a complete sentence, no matter how short. If her mind had not had this new information, she would have just sat there in her rocking chair and continued to cry.

“I’m sorry, Mom!” Jacob knew he now had to finish what he had started. “I thought you had found out that Dad and Marsha were spending evenings together. I thought that’s why he slammed the door, and why you are crying. He told me never to tell, or else I’d lose my inheritance and break your heart. You

GRIEF

know how angry Dad gets.”

All of a sudden, it became clear in Joanna’s mind. Now she understood why he never had the time to take their cattle down the valley to the common watering-hole, and why he insisted on using their neighbors’ water. He wanted to use the time to be with her.

Joanna’s heart began turning from the pain of her lost husband and mate to the anger of being betrayed.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DECISION

SPENT emotions, little sleep, and a mind racing through memories and “what-ifs” made for a long night. The only good thing about this morning was that Joanna and Jacob were still alone and alive. They had made it through the night—a night filled with uncertainty. It was a new experience to have such a night, but it would become the norm all too soon.

It is good to have a friend. Even better to have a best friend. Ruby was such a friend to Joanna. The sun was at its highest point in the sky, following the worst night in Joanna’s life, when she noticed someone coming down the road. She had been watching the road all morning, waiting, still crying, lost in a mindset which made her unable to formulate a plan or even motivate herself to attend to her usual needs.

It was good to recognize Ruby, yet Joanna gazed beyond her friend, trying to see the people behind

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her—the people coming to do ill to her son and herself—but she could not see any. Her mind only imagined them. It didn't take Ruby long to knock on the front door. Her steps had been fast and deliberate.

“Are you home, Joanna? It's me, Ruby! Are you home?”

No answer came. The fear was greater than their friendship. The indecision was in control.

“Joanna! Are you there?”

Slowly, Ruby opened the door. Before her stood Joanna and Jacob, holding each other.

“Oh, you poor dears! Don't be afraid. Everyone knows it wasn't you. Even your neighbors whose barn was burnt down are not mad at you. They have twin boys to take care of. The village folks are going to get together and rebuild their barn. I was sent to see what you need. Actually, I asked to be the one to come and see you.”

“Thank you, Ruby.” This time, the tears running down Joanna's cheeks were tears of relief. Here before her was a friend, bringing her comfort and exoneration from her husband's crime. It was a high crime to burn a man's barn. Death was an accepted penalty.

When the mind and emotions are frozen, one cannot think clearly. With the news from Ruby, Joanna's thoughts started to clear up, her emotions had a path to follow. She began to think of her son,

THE DECISION

their life, and what they should do.

She knew one thing immediately—the shame brought upon them by her husband would not allow her to stay in her house, or to be a part of the village. She would have to leave. She thanked Ruby for coming, taking her by the hand, and escorting her to the door

It shocked Ruby to see her friend change so abruptly. Joanna thanked her and gave her such a big hug while saying good-bye that it sounded like a final farewell. Ruby didn't realize that it really would be, for Joanna's mind had been made up almost instantly. She would leave this place.

The next few sunrises were extremely busy. They were kept so as much because of what needed to be done, as also to keep her mind off of the tragedies.

Every now and then she would see someone walk past her house. As they got closer, their steps became longer and faster, not wanting to linger in front of "Joanna's house." They would try to look for a glimpse of Joanna or Jacob. None of them ever came to the door. Even her best friend did not come back—but it was not because she didn't care. Ruby was giving Joanna time to heal, but she didn't know that time had already run out.

Knowing the decision to stay was not an option for her or her son, she made other plans. She would not

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allow her son to go through life with the handicap of a father who was known for burning down a barn just to spend time with his mistress. "Like father, like son," people would say. She knew they would not only say it, but always think it.

She parked her wagon at the back of her house, making sure anyone walking by the house could not see it.

She started building a frame over the top of the open wagon, making the wagon three times taller. The structure would support a cloth covering in order to keep them out of the rain. She spent many sunrises building the frame and evenings hand-sewing the cover out of pieces of cloth, then she rubbed a mixture of beeswax and pine tree pitch into the threads of the make-shift cover. She tested to see if water would run off of it, and it seemed to be working.

Jacob was collecting and packing the things they would need. Food was a priority, yet Joanna knew wild vegetables, fruits, and tubers grew everywhere. She wanted Jacob to pack grains and jerky.

A shovel and rake would be needed, as well as some special seeds, which were not as easy to get as wheat, barely, and oats. They also packed blankets, clothes, and spices like salt and cinnamon.

She would not take any of their animals, except for two horses to pull the wagon, leaving a note, giving

THE DECISION

everything that was left to her neighbor, to help pay for her husband's crime.

Finally, about seven sunrises later, they were ready to go. It was not quite sunrise when she hooked up her two best horses to the wagon, and they started on their adventure into a totally unknown future where they had no friends, no relatives, no direction, and no understanding of what they would find.

Decisions are sometimes thrust upon a person by circumstances outside of their control. An observer may believe that the easiest way or direction has been chosen, when in fact what first appeared easy may eventually prove to be the hardest and bravest decision as well as the best choice, enabling a person's soul to begin a journey along an important new path.

By the time the sun had reached its highest point in the sky, they were out of the vicinity of the village. Joanna never had one inkling or thought of turning around and going back. Her mind was set on a completely new life, and she would have it, or die trying. She could never have imagined how important her decision would be. Many thousands of sun-cycles in the future, a descendant of hers would live forever.

CHAPTER THREE

DECEPTION

HOW beautiful it is when a plan works. Joanna's plan was simple, and perhaps that was the reason it seemed to be a success.

She knew the crossroads were just one sunset away. By the time any travelers she met had made it back to her village, she would be beyond where they could find her. She had been traveling from the south, and once she arrived at the crossroads, she would wait until she saw someone coming from one of the three other directions. Her hope was that she wouldn't have to wait too long, as she knew that Ruby would send someone after her soon, and if they caught up to her first, she would have to change her plan.

Not only was this simple plan the best, but luck made it better. She had no sooner stopped her wagon than she saw another wagon coming from the westward leading road.

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“Giddy-up!” She snapped the reins hard and ordered her horses ahead, turning west towards the coming wagon. Soon she had to move over to the side of the road to give more room to the approaching wagon.

As the other wagon passed, she recognized the man, woman, and two children in it as being from her village. She knew they had been gone for a while, visiting the woman’s relatives in the next town. She knew they recognized her, too! They stared blankly at her as they passed.

It was hard for her to not look back at them. For a while, she could hear them talking and saying her name. She could tell they were wondering where her husband was, and why she would be alone with her son. Obviously, they had not heard the news. Unknown to them, they would help her fulfill her plan.

A little while after they were out of sight, she put her plan into action.

Pulling on the left reins, she was able to slowly turn the horses and wagon around, going back the way she had come. “Please. Please,” she was saying to herself under her breath. “Please don’t let us meet anyone else. Please!” Slowly, she approached the crossroads. There was no one in sight. So far, so good. This time, she whipped the reins harder. The horses

THANK YOU FOR
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THIS PREVIEW!

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Written by William Walther

Edited by Jeffrey R. Day & Susannah M. Day

Typeset & Published by Jeffrey R. Day
Roseburg, Oregon

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