

# *Bentonsport:* A NEW CHAPTER

BY LISA SCHNEDLER



**Scrivenings**  
PRESS

Quench your thirst for story.  
[www.ScriveningsPress.com](http://www.ScriveningsPress.com)

Copyright © 2023 by Lisa Schnedler

Published by Scrivenings Press LLC  
15 Lucky Lane  
Morrliton, Arkansas 72110  
<https://ScriveningsPress.com>

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy and recording— without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Paperback ISBN 978-1-64917-328-7

eBook ISBN 978-1-64917-329-4

Editors: Shannon Taylor Vannatter and Heidi Glick

Cover by Linda Fulkerson, [bookmarketinggraphics.com](http://bookmarketinggraphics.com)

All characters are fictional, and any resemblance to real people, either factual or historical, is purely coincidental.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible® (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

*To Harold Schnedler, who brought this young bride to Bentonsport.  
Here's to more movie nights!*



## Chapter One

*Bentonsport, Iowa, 1869*

“**M**y dear, right now, we don’t need to plan your future —we need to plan your past.”  
“My past?” Sarah leaned back in the cranberry velvet chair, tucking a lock of blonde hair behind her ear.

Mrs. Lockhardt laughed, and her penetrating blue eyes sparkled like freshly washed crystal. A small woman, she patted at her silky white hair she’d pulled up in a bun, checking the tendrils placed in front of each ear to match the curls falling onto her forehead.

“We *could* always tell the truth. Let’s see. ‘Virginia, dear, I want you to meet my lovely friend, Sarah Peterson. Sarah just dropped into our lives yesterday. She’s visiting, perhaps even staying with us. You see, she lives more than a hundred years in the future. Thomas Barton couldn’t find a wife in our time, so he was given special passage back in time. There he found Sarah and urged her to come back here for a visit.’” She gave Sarah a half smile, her eyes still twinkling.

Sarah picked up the crimson pillow scented with orange oil, smoothed its satin pleats, and hugged it. She gazed at the dust-

specked sunbeam now pooled on the floor around her feet. “I see what you mean.”

“Pastor Lockhardt and I were discussing your predicament and have come up with a plan.”

She set the pillow down and leaned forward, straightening the folds of the bright-green ankle-length skirt she’d borrowed from her hostess.

“Matilda is visiting us for the holidays. My sister is here for one more day, and then is returning to her home in St. Louis. She can be a chatterbox, but she isn’t a gossip.” Mrs. Lockhardt sipped her tea as a log in the fireplace crumbled in the heat, sputtered, and lay in glowing chunks on the grate.

“Well, that is, she won’t buzz about matters if I tell her not to. If you agree to this plan, I will make her put her hand on the Holy Word and pledge to take this secret to her grave.”

As she placed her cup back in the saucer, Sarah’s heart beat faster, and her palms moistened. She pasted on a weak smile and nodded to her hostess to continue. Where was this going?

“My dear, given all you have been through, you must be overwhelmed. All this, and only your second day here with us, but it is the only way.”

“The only way ...?”

“Why, to create a believable past for you, of course, and prevent us from telling lie upon lie, tangling ourselves up in such a mess. Why, I blush over what everyone, let alone the Lord Himself, would think. We must fashion a life for you outside of Bentonsport. So I would like to tell Matilda your story and request she take you back to St. Louis for a couple of weeks.”

Wait? What? *Leave?* Sarah’s throat narrowed. That didn’t make sense. Well, nothing made sense.

Tired, so very tired, she clenched her jaw, holding in a yawn. Everything was strange in a weird old-fashioned way. All so foreign, so different. And one day ago, she’d left her own home and found herself here.

“You want me to leave with a person I just met? Leave tomorrow?”

Mrs. Lockhardt nodded, her tiny pearl earrings swaying. “I know this is hard. Likely unfathomable, given all you’ve been through. You must feel you cannot endure any more. But this is the best way forward. Matilda can ensure you have an honest, albeit short ‘past,’ and we can build your history from there. Of course, we’ll have to bring Thomas in on our plan.”

Sarah sat back. Yes, Thomas. He’d say no. Surely, he would. Of course, he would.

“I’ll ask my sister to serve as your tutor while creating a plausible past for you. She’ll teach you our time’s customs, dress, and language.” Mrs. Lockhardt folded her hands on her deep-blue dress. “And Pastor Lockhardt and I have a Christmas gift for you. As you’ve arrived here, with no clothes and no money, at least no money you can spend here”—the sides of her mouth turned up—“we are gifting you with three new outfits, made for you in St. Louis, and ten dollars.”

As she handed Sarah two gold coins, Sarah thought of a friend back in her Bentonsport, Richard Tarrant, and how much he’d love to hold one of these old—now new—coins. “Mrs. Lockhardt, you don’t—”

“Sarah, do call me Mary. We feel so privileged to be included in this—shall we say unusual—event. My, my, I ask myself over and over how in the world this could have occurred.”

Sarah nodded. She’d drifted off in a dreamless sleep and awakened in a strange bed, here, in the Lockhardts’ home, in the early morning light. From then until now, she’d been caught up in a whirlwind ... an inquisition ... the joy of their discovery ... receiving borrowed clothes ... and of course, seeing Thomas come through the church door. His shock. His joy. Their brief time together at the church with promises of meeting again soon. And now this. *This?* A trip to St. Louis. No ...

“But here we are, my friend. And we have to say God makes a way. Yes, always. But my, my ...” Mrs. Lockhardt—Mary—shook

her head again. “Well, there will be many days ... years to ponder all this. Go rest. Take a nice nap while I muster my courage to speak to Matilda and Pastor Lockhardt speaks with Thomas.”

She stood, hugged Sarah, and closed the door behind her.

Sarah jumped up to give Thomas a call. Her fingers trembled as she reached for a phone that didn't exist.

Looking out the window toward the academy, she placed her forehead against the wavy glass pane.

“Say no, Thomas. Dear Lord ... Thomas, please say no.”

THE TRAIN ROCKED BACK AND FORTH THROUGH SNOW-covered swaths of countryside. Every so often, a small town broke the monotony, and the train slowed, chuffing through the one-and-two-story brick buildings built back from the tracks. In every town, it seemed, children stopped and waved. Occasionally, grown-ups did as well.

Thomas rested his head against the seat. So much change. So fast. And if he was feeling this, what was Sara experiencing? He shook off a shudder and tightened his grip on her hand under the blanket draped over their laps while, with her free hand, she waved back at those they passed. The predawn train, with few local passengers and them bundled in outerwear and hats, had permitted escape. For that, he was grateful.

Across from them sat Matilda Ross, arms folded over her chest, red pocketbook pressed close to her broad tummy. She perched on the long, green, leather-covered bench, her wide girth taking up most of the double seat. Until this moment, she'd stared at Sara and Thomas like Sara stared at the Scottish shortbread cookies she made. ‘One minute brown, the next minute burnt,’ she liked to say. Their appointed chaperone took the job to heart.

But now, with the gentle rocking of the train, the strain of staring, and the lack of conversation, she nodded off, her head drooping first, eyes flickering, and then sleep.



With her first soft snore, Sara whispered to Thomas. “Why did you agree to this? What were you thinking?” Her voice cracked, and tears glossed her eyes. “I came here to be with you, and now you are sending me off? With her?”

They surveyed their guardian, ensuring her chest was still moving in a steady rhythm. Thomas put his lips to Sara’s ear, and she leaned in to hear him above the clacking wheels and the hooting whistle.

“What could I say?” His whisper sounded almost shrill. “The women in town would drill you, nicely of course, and if they found a crack in the story, they would leap on it. The Lockhardts are correct. You must live outside Bentonsport for a few weeks so you have a past life we can reference.”

The train swayed over some rough tracks, causing him to lean hard against her. Their chaperone repositioned her neatly coiffed, graying auburn head against the seat back and continued napping.

“Besides, it will give you the freedom to learn how to maneuver this world and make your mistakes in a city where they won’t be noticed or will be forgotten.”

She scrunched her nose, apparently unconvinced.

“Remember what you thought when I walked into your shop? Remember how many times I struggled, seemed awkward, strange?”

When she gave in to a reluctant smile, he continued, “Remember my Amish clothes?”

She laughed, lowering her head.

Much better like this, than crying.

He took a deep breath. Out the window beyond her shoulder, light snow fell, spreading across the fields like powdered sugar she used so freely in her bakery. He squeezed her hand. “Three weeks, I promise. No more than three weeks. Either Pastor Lockhardt or I will come for you. Do you have a purse with you?”

Nodding, she reached under her seat for a rectangular black clutch. “Mrs. Lockhardt—she’s so nice. She lent me this purse,

bought my train ticket, and gave me money to purchase three outfits in St. Louis. And she doesn't even know me."

"She knows me and trusts my judgment in women, I imagine." He offered a half smile, trying to lighten the mood while giving her strength and courage for the days ahead. "You are a brave woman, Sara. You, shall we say, permitted yourself to be transported over a century back in time. Comparatively, this will be a vacation. Three weeks in St. Louis."

Not seeming persuaded, she gazed at the snowy fields, white swaths with stubby, tan cornstalks pointing through, harvest long ago completed.

*Ahem.* He cleared his throat loud enough to get her attention. Their coach mate slumbered on.

Sara faced him, expressionless but not tearful.

He cupped her chin in his hand. "I would not permit this if you could be harmed in any way. Matilda Ross knows your true story. This trip gives you the space to adjust and develop a story you can return with. Here ..." He reached into his coat, took out four envelopes from the inside pocket, and handed them over. Three of them were addressed to him and stamped. The fourth was sealed.

"Write me a long, newsy letter each week. I will do the same. When you drop the last letter off at the post office, know you are in the final days before returning."

"And the fourth envelope?" She cocked her head.

"A return train ticket. It is your security. Know you can take the next train back if anything makes you uncomfortable. Mary Lockhardt's sister lives a carriage ride away from the train station. At any time, you can leave. Just leave. You are not a prisoner, okay?"

She relaxed against him, their shoulders touching now, and he said a brief prayer of thanks over having made that last-minute purchase.