

*Fireflies* IN SACRED  
*Shadows*

LOST AND FOUND BOOK 2

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*Home is the place where hope glimmers  
in the darkness.*



*To Jesus, who sits with me in suffering and shows me how to face the  
darkness instead of fleeing from it.*



# Chapter One

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*Van Buren, Arkansas*  
*Late September 1853*

As Rebecca Hogue handed her older sister, Ivajohn, a box in exchange for a blue bellflower stem, the ladies sitting around the parsonage parlor leaned closer. How many times had Ivajohn's wedding been postponed? Rebecca worried a leaf between her thumb and forefinger, holding her breath. Its rough texture and dark color complemented the blooms' delicate beauty. With careful planning, the group had managed to organize a surprise bridal tea in Ivajohn's honor.

The close-knit sewing circle had gathered for weeks, stitching to ensure the Hogue family would be sharply dressed for Ivajohn's upcoming ceremony. Somehow, they successfully catered to each sister's request while respecting Ivajohn's desire for simplicity. Cordelia demanded something pink with ribbons, while Martie wanted no frills and absolutely no pink. Nellie, sweet girl, wished to embellish her bonnet with ribbon and lace.

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Eddie pleaded for boy's knickers underneath her skirt so she could climb trees when the ceremony concluded.

Rebecca smiled inwardly. Dressing Pa and three brothers had proven far simpler.

Ivajohn lifted the lid and hummed with delight, admiring the simple cream-colored bonnet. Rebecca's instinct had been correct despite Mrs. Pratt's urging to obtain a more elaborate adornment from Brandt's Tailor Shop. She exhaled as Ivajohn's mouth curved in a demure bow.

"It's exactly what I hoped for."

Rebecca exhaled, some small weight lifted from her chest.

Across the room, Mrs. Pratt's arched eyebrow and pursed lips signaled her displeasure. Rebecca squeezed Ivajohn's shoulder. "We'll add yellow bush pea stems and a blue ribbon on the wedding day, as Mrs. Pratt suggested."

Mrs. Pratt's expression softened as she drifted closer with a cluster of women, bright chatter filling the parlor. Rebecca moved to the window. A playful breeze stirred the oak across the road, scattering shadows across the grass, and her eyes caught a trace, a shape resisting the sway of the shifting leaves. She leaned closer to the glass, but a gust tossed the branches wide again, and whatever she thought she saw disappeared. Perhaps it was a trick of the light.

Yet, a faint unease laced through her as she turned away. The hum of laughter pulled her back into the moment. She returned to her seat, twisting the flower stem between her fingers.

"Everything all right?" Eliza Dawn settled beside her.

"An overactive imagination, I'm afraid." Rebecca masked her concern with a smile. "Every time Dr. Dibrell and Dr. Pernot leave, I half-expect a frazzled messenger at the door. I don't mind helping, but our little town would benefit from another well-trained doctor. What if both doctors are gone and something happens on the wedding day?"

"Don't even think it." Eliza Dawn leaned closer. "You made

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it here this morning without any issues. And Dr. Pernot will be back soon.”

“Yes, but I can’t stand being called away and causing more delays.”

Eliza Dawn grinned. “It has been an unusually long courtship.”

“It’s understandable with both of them involved traveling regularly into Indian Territory for missionary work.” Rebecca paused, swallowing hard as her gaze fell to the flowers. “And other unforeseen events.”

“Your family has faced more than its fair share of trials.” Eliza Dawn gently patted her hand. “I wish I could have met your mother before she passed away.”

“Dawn, your arrival after we lost her was a blessing.” The memory of losing Mama tugged at Rebecca’s heart, and she squeezed Eliza Dawn’s hand. “You and Justin have faced your own trials. How have you been?”

“We were holding dreams of a family in open hands.” Eliza Dawn’s expression dimmed. “But I think it’s time we let it go. I can’t bear the disappointment anymore.”

“Would you consider embracing a child in need?”

“Maybe. After taking time to grieve.”

“Of course.” Rebecca rubbed Eliza Dawn’s hand. “Of course, we’ve had reasons to celebrate as well. I gained a wonderful sister-in-law and friend when Justin opened his heart to you.”

“I’ve received the greater blessing. You all made me part of a family once more.” Eliza Dawn’s voice grew gentler. “I’m curious, though. When will you open your heart again? You’ve never stopped grieving the loss of him. I see it in your eyes.”

Rebecca’s throat tightened. “He made his choice.”

She turned slightly, the ache over losing him sharp and familiar as she dropped the bellflower onto her lap. Then, with a guarded smile, she pushed aside thoughts of Ben Ewing.

“No matter.” She smoothed her skirt. “Today is about Ivajohn.”

Eliza Dawn didn’t press. She took the floral stem from Rebecca and placed it with the other flowers in the wide-mouthed jar on the side table. She squeezed Rebecca’s knee. “It’s time. You should call this gathering to order.”

Rebecca stood, raising her hand. The conversation buzzed. She glanced at Eliza Dawn, whose expression warmed with support. Someone swished by, and something cool slipped into her hand. She turned her palm over to reveal a tiny bell. A backward glance met a warm smile from her friend Allie.

“A gift from my blacksmithing husband.” Allie winked.

Rebecca rang it, and every eye settled on her.

“Thank you for sewing, mending, and stitching love into every seam. Thanks to your hard work, we finished ahead of schedule. We’ve spruced up our family’s Sunday best, though it may have been handed down a time or two.”

“Mine’s been handed down more than that,” blurted eight-year-old Edie, and the room rippled with laughter.

Rebecca smiled, cheeks warm. “Now a surprise for Ivajohn.”

Eliza Dawn and Allie slipped into the kitchen. Rebecca turned to her sister. “Ivajohn, welcome to your bridal tea. We wanted to bless you and Pastor Turner as you begin your life together.”

Ivajohn’s cheeks flushed. “You didn’t have to do this, but this explains why you preferred the last gathering at the parsonage.”

“Yes, and it gave the men more reason to finish the parsonage repairs.”

“I don’t know how you managed it.”

“Well, it helped that you didn’t go with Pastor Turner and the missionaries on this trip to Indian Territory.” Rebecca squeezed her sister’s hand.

“I wanted the chance to settle in early.” Ivajohn surveyed the

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room. “The parsonage is so bare without a woman’s touch. It’s silly, I know, but I want it to feel like *our* home when he carries me across the threshold. And I want to enjoy his company without having to worry about setting up house. Do you think Emil will like what I’ve done?”

“He’ll love it.” Rebecca fingered the crocheted lap blanket draped over Ivajohn’s chair back. “Will he see it before the wedding?”

“No. He’ll return the day before the wedding and spend the night at Levi’s so they can finalize the ceremony notes since Emil can’t officiate his own wedding.” Ivajohn laughed awkwardly at the joke she’d made.

Rebecca resumed her address of the room. “All right, ladies, gifts may go on the table in front of the settee.”

Packages wrapped in ribbon appeared from hidden baskets, and at Mrs. Pratt’s insistence, Ivajohn rose to speak. Tall, slender, awkward as a heron, Ivajohn folded her hands tightly as her voice shook. Her words stumbled, but the sincerity in her face warmed Rebecca’s heart.

“I—I—” Ivajohn’s hand fluttered to her throat. “You caught me off-guard. I’m honored and humbled. And so, with my deepest thanks, I, um, thank you.”

When Ivajohn finished her halting thanks, Rebecca folded her hands. “Let us pray.” She bowed her head. “Lord, bless this union, the family You’ve knit together, and the food provided. Teach us to trust You, even when the future seems uncertain. Amen.”

The blessing warmed the room as Rebecca led them to the refreshments. Muscadine strudel filled the air with its rich scent. Pies, pastries, nuts, and cheese filled the table.

“Rebecca, you’ve done a lovely job.” Mrs. Pratt picked up a plate. “The simplicity is admirable.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Pratt.” Rebecca hid her amusement. Mama had taught her to accept Olivia Pratt’s backhanded compliments

with a heaping helping of grace. “Ivajohn values simplicity. A quality fitting a pastor’s wife, don’t you think? So, while we wanted to surprise her, we aimed not to overwhelm.”

“Well done, dear.” Mrs. Pratt added fruit and nuts to her plate. “I wish she had accepted the offer of a finer dress.”

“She appreciated it.” Rebecca lifted her cup. Little Edie fluttered in and danced around the two of them. “But she wanted something she could wear every day. The bonnet with fresh flowers and ribbon will dress it up nicely.”

Mrs. Pratt’s expression softened. “Mahala would have filled the room with vibrant blooms for such an occasion.”

“I know,” Rebecca whispered, the ache rising again.

Mrs. Pratt cupped Rebecca’s chin. “You’re the ribbon holding this family together, Rebecca.”

Tears pricked the corners of Rebecca’s eyes. “I want to give Ivajohn a wonderful beginning as she looks to the future.”

“She’ll be able to see so far into the future with my gift, you won’t even have to worry, Becca.” Edie grabbed two gingersnaps and dipped them into Bavarian cream. Rebecca shot her a warning glance. “That’s why Ivajohn will like my gift best.” Edie skipped out of the room, rejoining the parlor festivities.

A collective gasp swept through the parlor.

Allie appeared, breathless. “Rebecca, you’d better come. It’s Edie.”

Rebecca’s heart dropped. “Oh, my.”

Rebecca rushed into the parlor where she found Ivajohn holding a brass spyglass between her thumb and forefinger like a dead rodent. Hurrying across the room, she bit back a groan. She took it from Ivajohn, spinning on her heels and grasping Edie by the elbow.

She steered Edie into the now-vacant dining room, crouching to meet her eye.

“Where—” The word came out sharper than she intended.

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Rebecca swallowed, easing her tone. “Where did this come from?”

Edie dropped her chin and clasped her hands in front of her.

“Is it Pa’s? Did you take this from the mantle at home?”

Edie shook her head.

“Then where?” Rebecca folded Edie’s hands in hers.

“I wanted Ivajohn to have something special.” Edie’s eyes reddened.

“Where did you find it, Edie?”

No answer.

“Go sit in the kitchen until we’re done here.” Rebecca placed her hands on her hips. “You’ll have extra chores until you’re ready to tell me.”

“Am I going to miss the sleepover?”

Rebecca hesitated. She hated having to make decisions like this, but in the wake of their mother’s death it seemed the responsibilities of motherhood landed squarely upon her shoulders, especially since Ivajohn traveled so frequently with the missionaries. The sisters had planned to stay at the parsonage, keeping Ivajohn company before her future mother-in-law arrived. Only Rebecca would miss it. Someone had to manage the boardinghouse. Mama would have found a way to offer grace without overlooking consequences.

“I’ll speak with Dawn. If she agrees, you can stay, but you’ll do chores before bed.”

Edie sulked into the kitchen. Rebecca pressed her palm to her forehead, willing away the pressure building behind her eyes. When she lowered her hand, Eliza Dawn stood before her, bright-eyed and knowing.

“You know where it came from.” Eliza Dawn plucked the object from Rebecca’s hand.

Rebecca sighed. “The lost and found room. I wish Pa had never agreed to keep all the items left behind on the steamboats.

No one ever claims them.” She sipped her tea. “Don’t look at it that way, Eliza Dawn.”

“You only call me Eliza Dawn when trying to rein in my curiosity.” Eliza Dawn grinned, flipping the brass tube back to Rebecca. “I won’t deny I’m curious. But I’ll leave this one alone. There are enough mysteries in my journalism work. Like the new hotel owner, Ambrose Baas.” She dropped her voice. “I suspect he came to Van Buren to do more than run a hotel. And with Justin leaving on ranch business, I want to investigate as many stories as possible.”

Rebecca’s brows furrowed. “I can’t believe Justin and Pa are setting out now, of all times.” She sighed. “The timing is ridiculous.”

“They’ll be back for the wedding.” Eliza Dawn offered a half-smile.

“I’m glad Pa’s going with him. There’s no way he’d miss his oldest daughter’s wedding. Sometimes Justin gets so wrapped up in horses he loses track of time.” Rebecca turned the spyglass over in her hands. “A spyglass? Who would leave this behind?”

“Military scout, maybe, though it’s hard to imagine one losing something so valuable.” Eliza Dawn shook her head.

“Well, whatever its story, it’s going straight back to the lost and found when I get home.” Rebecca returned to her seat in the parlor and tucked the spyglass into her sewing basket.

“Mm-hmm.” Eliza Dawn wagged a playful finger. “Mark my words, some things have a way of finding their way back out again.”

Rebecca smiled dryly. “I refuse to give it another thought.”

She patted the basket, leaving the spyglass and her unease in better hands than hers.