

The Potion Hunter

The woods, mostly oak and cottonwood trees, out behind our farm, were entrapped in a fog clouded haze, which by all accounts would be burned off in a couple of hours by the sun. I saw him coming through. I could tell by his stance as he turned toward our cabin, the sureness of his gait coming forward, and the muzzle shotgun he held tight against his body. It was a rite of passage for this eighteen-year-old to have such a weapon of survival. The gun had been handed down for generations, I suppose, like most family heirlooms. But he was walking straight for the cabin and I did not expect any visitors this morning, especially this boy-man I loved so much from afar. His name was Lucas, Father called him Luke for short. If he would notice me, I would call him my future lover and husband. But for now, I'd just call him a friend.

Father answered the door and let Lucas inside. I stood by the stove near the back wall cleaning the cast iron skillet from the morning breakfast.

"Morning Luke, glad you could make it," Father said.

"Morning, sir," Lucas replied.

Out of the side of my eyes, I could see Lucas looking at me. It wasn't my place to speak first.

"Lucas, this here is my daughter Hannah. I guess you two are about the same age," Father said.

"Morning miss," Lucas said toward me.

He actually spoke to me for the first time as we were properly introduced. I was nervous, afraid of saying the wrong words, so I just nodded my head and continued with my chore.

"Thanks, sir, for taking me hunting, my folks are gone for the week," Lucas said to Father. "I hope I can learn something."

“We’ll see. I’ll get my double-barrel back in the barn. We’ll take to the treeline then,” Father said as he left.

“I’ve seen you around,” Lucas muttered.

I turned and smiled. “I’ve seen you too.”

Lucas looked down. “You were carrying some blue-colored bottles in your hand in town, kind-of matched your eyes.”

I could feel myself blush. “I make potions to sell, to help people with their aches and pains.”

“Ready, Luke,” Father said as he peeked into the doorway, “Let’s go. Be back later, Hannah.”

And the two people I loved the most since my mother had died, left to go hunting.

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Father’s voice yelled out my name twice. It made me cringe. I rushed to open the door to see my father, panting out loud, carrying the limp eighteen-year-old into the cabin. Father placed him on my bed. Lucas’s right shoulder was bloodied.

“Is he?” I asked.

“No, the damn fool ran out in front of me in the fog as I was unloading the second shot. No, just winged him, a flesh wound, but I’ll have to get Doc Parrish to see,” Father said, “Just rip open his shirt and hold off the bleeding a bit until I come back. He’ll come around.”

After Father left, I knelt down next to my bed and held a cloth to the open wound, pressing down. Lucas moaned then spoke.

“Sorry, miss, I put you through all this trouble,” he said, “Guess my paw was right about jumping the gun all the time. Been shooting a single shot so long, I forgot about the other.”

“Glad you’re alive, I was scared when Father carried you inside.”

Lucas saw the worried look on my face. He also looked at my tied-back blonde hair, my small nose, and those ears which sometimes stuck out too far. But it was my blue eyes he stared into and I into his brown ones which made the silence linger.

“So you make potions to relieve pain?” he said. The spell broke. “Think I need some right about now.” He hesitated. “I make things too. I whittle wood into brushes, make combs, but with my shoulder like this, I’d be lucky if I can make toothpicks now.”

He made me smile. I got up to gather the potion bottles and in doing so noticed my mother’s worn out hairbrush on the same shelf.

I returned to Lucas, knelt and took off the wound cloth. The bleeding had stopped.

“This is going to burn,” I said.

“I can take the pain, as long as you’re near,” he said and winced some when I poured the potion over his wound.

I then understood what I had to do. I wanted only him and him only. And I would do anything to keep him mine.

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The doctor took one look at the wound, moved Lucas’s right arm around and pressed on the shoulder. “Make a fist,” he said. Lucas barely moved his fingers into a ball.

“Have to get hold of his folks somehow, looks like he’ll need surgery,” Doctor Parrish said, “The recovery will take a while. Need someone to take care of him until his socket gets well.”

“Lucas can stay here,” I said, “I’ll take care of him, Father.”

“I’m sure you could, for a while till his maw and paw come and get him. You got chores to do, potions to make and I have the farm to take care of,” Father said.

Dr. Parrish had all the needed supplies in his wagon and the surgery was finished in an hour. I stayed with Lucas while both men went back to town and sent a telegraph to Lucas’s folks. But Father didn’t come back alone.

In a small town, word got around, especially when the doctor was gone for a time. Two young ladies, The Pickle sisters, eighteen and twenty, accompanied Father back to the cabin to see how Lucas was doing.

“He’s doing fine,” I said a few minutes after they arrived. “Don’t you have Bible study soon?” I asked.

“It would be much easier for the two of us,” one sister said as the other sister finished the sentence, “to take care of him. We could take turns. Besides, don’t you have to help your father make potions or do chores?”

“I’ll let you know if I ever need help. I’m sure I can manage,” I said, “Good day ladies.”

The busybodies huffed their way back to town on the same carriage they arrived in. I was sure there would be more coming especially if the sisters told everyone he was still laid-up. Luckily, the chloroform the doctor used hadn’t worn off and Lucas had no memory of their visit.

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The telegram arrived about supertime just as Lucas awoke. Father read it out loud.

“Sorry to burden you. Hope Lucas better. Aunt Rose to take Lucas home tomorrow. Zed & Mary.” All I heard was Lucas was leaving and I only had a few hours to be with him.

Aunt Rose arrived on time. Father opened the door. She had a corn-fed body with a sour lemon look on her face.

“I’m here to take Lucas away from you,” she said.

“Never,” I said underneath my breath while I put more potion on Lucas’ shoulder.

Lucas moved his arm around. “I don’t feel any pain,” he said. He then moved it more. He smiled.

“Thank you for his care,” Aunt Rose said, “but he has to come to rest up so he can make the brushes and combs. The family depends on the revenue to help with the bills.”

“My daughter makes potions to provide for us too in the winter,” Father said.

Lucas and I both looked at each other.

“Father, I have an idea,” I said, “Lucas can’t do the brushes with one arm, but he can use my arms. He can show me how he does it. I have mother’s old brush that needs fixin’. And I, in turn, can show him how to mix potions. Aunt Rose can stay here to take care of him just like at his home. I bet she’s a good cook too. Only until his folks get home.

“Well, what do you think, Rose? I could use the help, Father said, “They could still make the same items to sell and make the money.”

On the second day of the week, with all four of us living under the same roof, Doc Parrish visited to buy some potion he heard about from Aunt Rose. Since after examining Lucas’s arm, he was convinced it worked wonders; patients would need it.

Lucas had whittled 2 brushes that day. I inserted the bristles in each one. We both mixed potions

together from flowers and herbs. We made enough bottles for the Doc to bring back with him. And he also bought two brushes for each his wife and daughter too. But I was with Lucas. And Lucas was with me. And that's what mattered the most. After the harvest, we got married in the white chapel in the center of town with brushes and potions for all the guests.

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