

*Illuminating*  
**DARK  
VALLEY**

*Pauline Henning*

**KW**  
KingdomWinds  
PUBLISHING

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**PRAISE FOR**  
*Illuminating Dark Valley*  


From the beginning, this book was very hard to put down. Pauline has a real talent for making the Scalini family and the valley come alive with descriptive verbiage and heart. It will appeal to all ages, especially young women adventuring out into their young adult lives. It is unique in its storyline and character development. Kudos to Pauline for her perseverance in bringing this story and family off the pages into authentic, original, dynamic, imaginative writing. You will no doubt wish you had bought two, one to give away! Looking forward to the sequel!!

— Bev Gadbois, Editor, Hersher Pilot



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# Dedication

A decorative flourish consisting of three stylized, overlapping loops that resemble the letter 'W' or a calligraphic flourish.

This book is dedicated to my six siblings with whom sharing life was often adventurous and sometimes mysterious.

# Acknowledgments



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H.S.





# CHAPTER 1

## Who Would Have Thought?



Who would have thought something so simple would be the solution to something so complex? Had I known my silly teenage insecurity would spark such a momentous invention, I'd have done it sooner!

It started on a sparkly spring day as I followed Pa's footsteps to the field to help tend the sheep. Trying unsuccessfully to walk in his footsteps put me close enough to Pa's back with his familiar tweed wool coat saturated in cigar aroma, which I have grown to love. It was the only coat I'd ever known him to own. Boots crunching through the newly fallen snow gave me the vague sense of marching to war, even though I couldn't imagine that in Dark Valley, especially on days like today when heaven seemed to touch Earth. The sun gave me a sense of wonder as it ricocheted perfectly off the lightly falling flakes, refracting into a million shards of color. The phenomenon so surreal yet tangible bonded Pa and I in a way no one else could enjoy.

I knew the drill. Take Jeb, the Australian Sheepdog, up the hill to herd the sheep back down to feed. Jeb could have handled it himself, but it never worked out that way because Pa had come to rely on me, maybe because we did have this special connection. Ever since Ma passed, I became Pa's confidante. I didn't mind and felt honored that he picked me

to consult. Plus, lending a listening ear was the least I could do after all he'd done for us. Raising seven children alone under normal circumstances would be challenge enough. Adding six months of frigid weather in continual darkness made it heroic. Living in this isolated mountain village was all I'd ever known except for occasional visits to Milan, the nearest city. Despite our struggles, I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. I loved our life here in Dark Valley.

Like I was a good listener for my Pa, that's what Jeb was for me. I could be talking to Jeb for an hour, and he'd sit there as if I were the most interesting person in the whole world. He had understanding eyes, one blue and one brown, coupled with his crooked ear, flopped over always in my direction. His serene, attentive demeanor made me think he believed everything I said was brilliant. Pa brought Jeb back from Milan when he was just a pup. Instead of being an outside dog to help with herding and protecting, he ended up inside. He was often found under the dining table, competing for fallen scraps with Choo Choo, the farm cat. Choo Choo was supposed to kill the mice, but she wasn't much of a hunter. She liked to play with the mice and let them go, which totally defeated her life's purpose. But you can't teach a lover to be a fighter in animal or man, so there's no sense trying.

Jeb snuck in front of the fire in the sitting room from under the table, and then Jeb followed me upstairs to sleep under my bed. He seemed to understand the importance of being inconspicuous to remain in the house. However, it was challenging in our small home, especially in the tiny bedroom I shared with three other sisters. Our room was directly at the top of the stairs, with my bed being first, smack dab in front of the entrance, which had no door. It was reasoned that since I had to be up first to feed the sheep, I should be closest to the door to not wake the others. At first, no one noticed Jeb, who usually slipped under my bed. Until one night, Jeb, half asleep, nuzzled Eileen's arm

by mistake, thinking it was mine. You would have thought there was a robber in the house the way she screamed, which woke everyone except, of course, the boys. They would have slept even if a freight train were chugging through the living room. Pa, however, came straight away, and once he saw it was only Jeb, I suppose he was relieved it wasn't a robber, so Jeb got to stay.

Jeb was a good listener but not so good at offering counsel or advice. For that, I tried to guess what my Ma would have said. So, when I saw Ma's old compact sitting atop Eileen's dresser, I felt no regret in borrowing it the next morning. Ma always used to say the exact thing I needed to hear. Her precise words satisfied me without feeling lectured. I needed her now more than ever to answer my questions about how to look pretty. Sneaking a hurried peek in the small round mirror confirmed my worst fears about my beastly appearance. I quickly drove the compact into my pocket, knowing I would have uninterrupted time while herding the sheep for closer inspection.

Eileen, waking unusually early, rummaged through the dresser drawers. "Where is that thing? It was right here last night. Where did it go? Lily, Sophie, have you seen my compact?"

"Your compact?" I mumbled under my breath. "Hardly."

"Tia, did you take it?" Eileen screeched. Halfway down the steps with Jeb bouncing at my heels, I pretended not to hear her. We both made a clean exit. I sighed happily, escaping before needing to reply.

Just coming out of the dark season, I was relieved, as usual, to have made it. As the days' light lengthened, our spirits lifted. Half a year of veritable darkness left us starving for sunlight. We longed for it like an overdue, pregnant mother-to-be yearned for delivery. The sun slowly creeping over the top of the mountains gradually

increased daylight, starting with two or three hours of sunlight to a full sixteen hours by the middle of June.

“You want some breakfast?” Pa asked as he handed me a bacon and egg sandwich.

“Thanks, Pa.” I held the steaming sandwich in my hand. Not having the heart to reject his gift, I accepted it reluctantly.

“You better eat it before it gets cold,” Pa reminded me, seeing I hadn’t taken a bite yet.

“Yes, Pa,” Yoke oozed down my chin with the first bite. I was glad now as the warmth edged into my empty belly. Sometimes, Pa knew what I needed before I did.

Our trek to the sheep was easier today as the deep snow drifts had begun to melt. Up on the hill with Jeb, I pulled out the compact to see if the makeup would cover these hideous freckles. “Oh, mio Dio,” if I could only tame this twisted mess of hair, I would be the happiest girl in the world. It never occurred to me to do anything except weave the thick, red, coarse thatch into pigtails. To ask for help seemed futile since my other three sisters had smooth, straight hair. “What happened to me?” I often wondered about that and other ways in which I seemed so different from the rest of my siblings.

Pa yelled up to me from below, “What was that?”

“What do you mean?”

“That. There it is again. Like a reflection of the sun hitting me in the face. How are you doing that?” Pa asked in a loud voice.

“I’m not doing anything. What are you talking about?”

I was unsure of what he was seeing and uncertain of what I had done to cause him to ask me how I had done it.

Finally, it dawned on me what had happened. The mirror had reflected the sun down to Pa. Scrambling to my feet to help Jeb with the sheep, I plunged the compact back into my pocket and got on with the task at hand. I didn't want Pa to know I had the compact in case it got back to Eileen.

Sean, the sheep, had snagged his head in the briers again. I'm not sure why he was so susceptible to that since, usually, sheep have very good memories. You'd think he'd remember where the briers were located and not to do something so stupid and mindless again. But I think some lambs get to grazing and lose track of their surroundings. Once, Sean got his head entangled to such an extent that he couldn't get it out. He must have been in that state most of the night because he seemed half-dead by the time we got there. It was a good thing I brought the clippers that morning to free Sean from prison.

We named all the sheep. There are little things about each one to distinguish one from another. Marabel has a birthmark in the shape of a bell on her ear. Sean reminds me of my cousin Sean, who visits every now and again. They both like to wander off. Clover loves to eat clover and on and on. It's not hard to see the differences when you spend so much time with them.

"Pa, we're missing one," I said.

"How can you be sure?"

"I counted them twice, and we're missing one. I think it might be Mable," I replied, somewhat exasperated.

"We better start looking. Hopefully, a wolf didn't get her," Pa replied.

"Hopefully, she's not having a baby or, worse, having trouble with the birth," I mumbled loud enough for Pa to hear as he came nearer. I knew from previous years that spring is the birthing season.

“Now, don’t go thinking the worst. I’m sure we’ll find her soon,” Pa spoke softly, trying to console me.

But I wasn’t consoled. “Mable! Where are you?” I yelled at the top of my lungs. “Mable! Mable!”

Jeb was close by, also sniffing under shrubs and low-hanging branches. With each passing minute, my heart rate increased. Mable had sheepskin like marble, just like her personality—sweet mixed with stubborn. Just as it occurred to me that her stubbornness may be an asset, I heard bleating in the distance and then Jeb barking.

“Jeb, where are you?” I yelled as I ran in the direction of his bark. I knew Jeb’s yapping meant trouble since he would never make a sound unless it were an emergency. Behind a grove of bushes lay Mable panting heavily. Pa came up behind me, quickly kneeling and feeling Mable’s belly.

“She’s in labor, but something doesn’t seem right,” Pa said, tearing off his coat and rolling up his sleeves. He put his hand inside of Mable, feeling for the lamb.

“Lamb is backward. I’ll try pulling its back legs rather than taking the time to turn it around,” Pa said.

It wasn’t but a few minutes before the lamb’s legs appeared. Pa continued pulling on those back legs until the whole lamb came out. He held the baby’s head down to drain, wiping the birthing fluid away from the nose and mouth so it could start breathing on its own. Steam rose from the lamb covered in fluid and blood. He pulled out his pocketknife and cut the umbilical cord. The lamb wriggled and sputtered for a minute before attempting to stand up. He must have inherited some of his mother’s stubbornness because, after several attempts, he was on all fours hobbling around.

“Way to go, Pa; you did it!” I exclaimed.

“We’re not out of the woods yet,” Pa responded. “I think the lamb is alright, but I’m not too sure about Mable.”

A million questions went through my head. What would we do if Mable didn’t make it? How would we get her baby to feed? Was there another ewe in the flock who was currently lactating? Would the new lamb bond with the surrogate mother?

“Tia, run to the house and bring back blankets, an empty bucket, warm water, rope, and your brother, Luca. Make sure it’s Luca, and have him bring the gun,” Pa said. “We only have a short window to get the lamb to bond with another ewe. I don’t think Mable is going to make it.”

“I wish I could run faster,” I thought as I pulled up the ends of my long dress and tucked it inside my winter bloomers. This freed my arms and legs. I must have looked funny, but I didn’t really care if anyone saw me.

Finally, reaching the barn, I yelled, “Luca, Pa needs you to come with me to the north field!”

“What for?” Luca hoisted another forkful of hay in the horse trough.

Out of breath, I sputtered, “Mable had a baby! Something is wrong! Bring your gun!”

“Why do I need my gun?”

“I don’t know. Pa just said to make sure you bring it.”

Upon returning, I could see Mable still hadn’t moved, and her baby was bleating and wandering around.

“Luca, I need you to stay and help me get Mable covered and see if we can’t get her milked even though she’s lying down. We may need the milk for the lamb. Tia, I need you to go inspect all of the ewes and find one with the youngest

lamb. Preferably one who gave birth today or yesterday. Take the baby with you, but don't wipe her off." Pa said.

"The baby's name is Sam, Pa," I said.

"Make sure you leave the baby, I mean Sam, with the ewe you've picked. If we can trick the new mom into thinking this little one is hers, then maybe they will bond, and she will let Sam nurse."

Pa continued turning to Luca, "Luca, cover Mable with the blanket. Then help me get the placenta out of her and into this empty bucket. Then we're going to try to milk her lying down."

I picked up Sam and felt the slimy, sticky amniotic fluid starting to dry on his coat. That and his smell compelled me to hold him away from my chest. Looking for the right mother was sort of like looking for the right spot to dig a well. There were certain things to look for, but ultimately, it was more a matter of intuition. Searching for the smallest lamb in the batch came down to two ewes: Hannah or Chloe. "Please, God, help me to pick the right one," I prayed. "Hannah or Chloe?" Hannah was kinder and more agreeable than Chloe, who was a good mother but, at times, could be persnickety. Hannah was the better choice, I surmised.

Hearing a shot coming from Mable's direction, I assumed Sam was now an orphan. I held back my tears for Mable as I tried to save Sam. I placed Sam down next to Hannah and her newborn. I immediately named her Gladys, hoping she would gladly accept Sam as her brother. It wasn't long until I saw Pa and Luca walking towards me carrying a bucket.

"Did you find the right one, Tia?" Luca asked.

"I hope so. This one here," I said as I pointed to Hannah.



Pa said, “Luca, take the bucket with the afterbirth and hold it up to Hannah’s nose. Let her smell it, then pour some of the fluid on Sam and the rest on Hannah’s back. Now Tia, put Sam under Hannah’s nose so she can smell the fluid on him and guide Sam to smell Hannah’s back so he can smell it on her. This may trick each to think they belong to each other because of the same smell.”

We watched as Sam smelled Hannah. His constant bleating told me he was starving and a little scared. Hannah bleated back to Sam and didn’t budge. She wasn’t rejecting him; she was welcoming him to feed. Amazing! Sam found her teat and began to suck. We stood there for the longest time watching Sam nurse, dreading what was to come next.